

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

DAVID L. KIRBY, III,

Plaintiff,

v.

5:25-CV-00202
(LEK/MJK)

STATE OF NEW YORK
CITY OF SYRACUSE
ONONDAGA COUNTY JUDGE LIMPBERT¹

Defendant.

David L. Kirby, III, Plaintiff, pro se

MITCHELL J. KATZ, U.S. Magistrate Judge

TO: THE HONORABLE SENIOR U.S. DISTRICT COURT JUDGE LAWRENCE E.
KAHN

ORDER and REPORT-RECOMMENDATION

Plaintiff commenced this action on February 12, 2025, by filing a complaint (Dkt. 1). On February 13, 2025, Senior United States District Court Judge Lawrence E. Kahn administratively closed this matter because Plaintiff failed to pay the appropriate filing fee. (Dkt. 2). On February 24, 2025, Plaintiff filed a motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* (“IFP”) with an inmate authorization form. (Dkt. 3, 4). The Clerk has

¹ The Court notes that Plaintiff incorrectly spelled “Judge Limpbert’s” name. It is spelled “Limpert.” The Court will use The correct spelling.

sent Plaintiff's complaint, together with his application to proceed *in forma pauperis* to this Court for its review.

I. IFP Application

Plaintiff declares in his IFP application that he is unable to pay the filing fee. (Dkt. 3). After reviewing his application, this Court finds that Plaintiff is financially eligible for IFP status.

However, in addition to determining whether a plaintiff meets the financial criteria to proceed IFP, the Court must also consider the sufficiency of the allegations set forth in the complaint in light of 28 U.S.C. § 1915. That statute requires courts to dismiss a case at any time if it determines that the action is (1) frivolous or malicious; (2) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or (3) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915 (e)(2)(B)(i)-(iii).

When determining whether an action is frivolous, courts must consider whether the complaint lacks an arguable basis in law or in fact. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989), *abrogated on other grounds by Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544 (2007) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915. Dismissal of frivolous actions is appropriate to prevent abuses of court process as well as to discourage the waste of judicial resources. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327; *Harkins v. Eldredge*, 505 F.2d 802, 804 (8th Cir. 1974). Courts have a duty to show liberality toward pro se litigants and must use extreme caution in ordering *sua sponte* dismissal of a *pro se* complaint before the adverse party has been served and has had an opportunity to respond. *Fitzgerald v. First E. Seventh St. Tenants Corp.*, 221 F.3d 362, 363 (2d Cir. 2000) But courts must still determine that

a claim is not frivolous before permitting a plaintiff to proceed. *Id.* (finding that a district court may dismiss a frivolous complaint *sua sponte* even when plaintiff has paid the filing fee).

To survive dismissal for failure to state a claim, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is “plausible on its face.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). “Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” *Id.* (citing *Bell Atl. Corp.*, 550 U.S. at 555).

In addition, Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) requires that a pleading contain a “short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Although Rule 8 does not require detailed factual allegations, it does “demand[] more than an unadorned, the-defendant-unlawfully-harmed-me accusation.” *Houston v. Collerman*, No. 9:16-CV-1009 (BKS/ATB), 2016 WL 6267968, at *2 (N.D.N.Y. Oct. 26, 2016) (quoting *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678). A pleading that contains allegations that “‘are so vague as to fail to give the defendants adequate notice of the claims against them’ is subject to dismissal.” *Id.* (citing *Sheehy v. Brown*, 335 F. App’x 102, 104 (2d Cir. 2009)).

II. Complaint

The complaint alleges that Plaintiff and his attorney were “deprived” of his right to be present at the grand jury proceeding. (Dkt. 1 at ¶ 4). Plaintiff further alleges that he was not allowed to “confront [his] hostile witnesses.” (*Id.*). Finally, the complaint

alleges that Plaintiff was indicted on “falsified evidence” and that he was denied a speedy and fair trial. (*Id.*).

III. Judge Limpert

Onondaga County Court Judge Limpert is immune from suit. The Second Circuit has ruled that “the New York State Unified Court System is unquestionably an arm of the State and is entitled to Eleventh Amendment sovereign immunity.” *Gollomp v. Spitzer*, 568 F.3d 355, 366 (2d Cir. 2009). Similarly, judges within the New York State Unified Court System are entitled to Eleventh Amendment immunity to the extent they are sued in their official capacity. *See Aron v. Becker*, 48 F. Supp. 3d 347, 366 (N.D.N.Y. 2014) (dismissing claim against a Delaware County judge on sovereign immunity grounds). Accordingly, Plaintiff cannot maintain his claims against Judge Limpert in his official capacity and the Court recommends that the complaint be dismissed with prejudice and without leave to amend.

The complaint against Judge Limpert, to the extent it alleges any claims against him in his personal capacity, is subject to dismissal on judicial immunity grounds. *See McNair v. Utica Police Dep’t*, 6:23-CV-699 (DNH/ATB), 2023 WL 4935993, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. June 26, 2023), *report and recommendation adopted*, No. 6:23-CV-699, 2023 WL 4931609 (N.D.N.Y. Aug. 1, 2023). It is well settled that judges have absolute immunity for their judicial acts performed in their judicial capacities. *See Mireles v. Waco*, 502 U.S. 9, 11 (1991); *see also Shtrauch v. Dowd*, 651 F. App’x 72, 73-74 (2d Cir. 2016) (“Generally, ‘acts arising out of, or related to, individual cases before the

judge are considered judicial in nature”)) (quoting *Bliven v. Hunt*, 579 F.3d 204, 210 (2d Cir. 2009)). “Judicial immunity applies even when the judge is accused of acting maliciously or corruptly.” *Coon v. Merola*, No. 1:19-CV-394 (DNH/ATB), 2019 WL 1981416, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. Apr. 8, 2019) (citing *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 419 n.12, (1976))), *report and recommendation adopted*, 2019 WL 1978595 (N.D.N.Y. May 3, 2019). “The only two circumstances in which judicial immunity does not apply is when he or she takes action ‘outside’ his or her judicial capacity and when the judge takes action that, although judicial in nature, is taken ‘in absence of jurisdiction.’” *Id.* (quoting *Mireles*, 502 U.S. at 11-12). Here, Plaintiff fails to plausibly allege that Judge Limpert was acting outside of his judicial capacity or in the absence of jurisdiction. The complaint should therefore be dismissed against Judge Limpert in his individual capacity with prejudice and without leave to amend.

IV. Opportunity To Amend

Generally, before courts dismiss a *pro se* complaint or any part of the complaint *sua sponte*, it should allow plaintiffs the opportunity to amend at least once. But leave to re-plead may be denied where any amendment would be futile. *See Ruffolo v. Oppenheimer & Co.*, 987 F.2d 129, 131 (2d Cir. 1993). Futility is present when the problem with plaintiff’s causes of action is substantive such that better pleading will not cure it. *See Cuoco v. Moritsugu*, 222 F.3d 99, 112 (2d Cir. 2000) (citation omitted). Here, because Judge Limpert is immune from suit, any amendment would be futile. The

Court therefore recommends that the complaint be dismissed with prejudice and without leave to amend.

WHEREFORE, based on the findings above, it is

ORDERED, that Plaintiff's motion to proceed IFP (Dkt. 3) is **GRANTED**,² and it is further

RECOMMENDED, that the District Court **DISMISS** the complaint (Dkt. 1) **WITH PREJUDICE** in its entirety against Judge Limpert without leave to amend, and it is further

ORDERED, that while Plaintiff may file objections to this Order and Report-Recommendation, before plaintiff submits any amended pleading, he should wait for the District Court to rule on the above Orders and Recommendations, and it is further

ORDERED, that the Clerk of the Court serve a copy of this Order and Report-Recommendation on plaintiff by regular mail together with copies of all unreported decisions cited herein in accordance with *Lebron v. Sanders*, 557 F.3d 76 (2d Cir. 2009) (per curiam).

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1) and Local Rule 72.1(c), the parties have fourteen (14) days within which to file written objections to the foregoing report. Such objections shall be filed with the Clerk of the Court. **FAILURE TO OBJECT TO THIS REPORT WITHIN FOURTEEN DAYS WILL PRECLUDE APPELLATE**

² The Court notes that although Plaintiff's IFP application has been granted, plaintiff will still be required to pay fees that he may incur in the future regarding this action, if it moves forward, including but not limited to copying and/or witness fees.

REVIEW. *Roldan v. Racette*, 984 F.2d 85, 89 (2d Cir. 1993) (citing *Small v. Secretary of Health and Human Services*, 892 F.2d 15 (2d Cir. 1989)); 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), 6(e), 72.

Dated: March 4, 2025

Hon. Mitchell J. Katz
U.S. Magistrate Judge

2016 WL 6267968

Only the Westlaw citation is currently available.
United States District Court, N.D. New York.

Eddie HOUSTON, Plaintiff,
v.
COLLERMAN, et. al., Defendants.

9:16-CV-1009 (BKS/ATB)

|
Signed 10/26/2016

Attorneys and Law Firms

EDDIE HOUSTON, 08-A-3122, Mid-State Correctional Facility, P.O. Box 2500, Marcy, New York 13403, Plaintiff, pro se.

AMENDED DECISION AND ORDER ¹

¹ On October 20, 2016, the Court issued a Decision and Order upon initial review of plaintiff's complaint. Dkt. No. 4. This Amended Decision and Order is issued to correct clerical errors in the Conclusion of the Order.

BRENDA K. SANNES, United States District Judge

I. Introduction

*1 The Clerk has sent to the Court for review a civil rights action filed by pro se plaintiff Eddie Houston. Dkt. No. 1 ("Compl."). Plaintiff has not paid the statutory filing fee for this action and seeks leave to proceed in forma pauperis. Dkt. No. 2 ("IFP Application").

II. IFP Application

"28 U.S.C. § 1915 permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in a federal court without prepayment of the filing fee that would ordinarily be charged." *Cash v. Bernstein*, No. 09-CV-1922, 2010 W L 5185047, at *1 (S.D.N.Y. Oct. 26, 2010). Upon review of plaintiff's IFP Application, the Court finds that plaintiff has demonstrated sufficient economic need and filed the inmate authorization form required in the Northern District of New York. Plaintiff's IFP application (Dkt. No. 2) is granted. ²

² Section 1915(g) prohibits a prisoner from proceeding in forma pauperis where, absent a showing of "imminent danger of serious physical injury," a prisoner has filed three or more actions or appeals that were subsequently dismissed as frivolous, malicious, or failing to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). Based upon the Court's review of plaintiff's litigation history on the Federal Judiciary's Public Access to Court Electronic Records ("PACER") Service, it does not appear that plaintiff has accumulated three strikes for purposes of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

III. Initial Screening

Having found that plaintiff meets the financial criteria for commencing this action in forma pauperis, and because plaintiff seeks relief from an officer or employee of a governmental entity, the Court must consider the sufficiency of the allegations set forth in the complaint in light of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e) and 1915A. Section 1915(e) of Title 28 of the United States Code directs that, when a plaintiff seeks to proceed in forma pauperis, "the court shall dismiss the case at any time if the court determines that – ... (B) the action ... (i) is frivolous or malicious; (ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or (iii) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief." 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). ³

³ To determine whether an action is frivolous, a court must look to see whether the complaint "lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact." *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989).

Similarly, under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, a court must review any "complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity" and must "identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of the complaint, if the complaint ... is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted; or ... seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief." 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b); see also *Carr v. Dvorin*, 171 F.3d 115, 116 (2d Cir. 1999) (per curiam) (noting that Section 1915A applies to all actions brought by prisoners against government officials even when plaintiff paid the filing fee).

*2 Additionally, when reviewing a complaint, the Court may also look to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. Rule 8 of

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the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure provides that a pleading which sets forth a claim for relief shall contain, *inter alia*, “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” See Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). The purpose of Rule 8 “is to give fair notice of the claim being asserted so as to permit the adverse party the opportunity to file a responsive answer, prepare an adequate defense and determine whether the doctrine of res judicata is applicable.” *Hudson v. Artuz*, No. 95 CIV. 4768, 1998 WL 832708, at *1 (S.D.N.Y. Nov. 30, 1998) (quoting *Powell v. Marine Midland Bank*, No. 95-CV-0063 (TJM), 162 F.R.D. 15, 16 (N.D.N.Y. June 23, 1995) (other citations omitted)).

A court should not dismiss a complaint if the plaintiff has stated “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). While the court should construe the factual allegations in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, “the tenet that a court must accept as true all of the allegations contained in a complaint is inapplicable to legal conclusions.” *Id.* “Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” *Id.* (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555). Rule 8 “demands more than an unadorned, the-defendant-unlawfully-harmed-me accusation.” *Id.* Thus, a pleading that contains only allegations which “are so vague as to fail to give the defendants adequate notice of the claims against them” is subject to dismissal. *Sheehy v. Brown*, 335 Fed.Appx. 102, 104 (2d Cir. 2009).

IV. Summary of the Complaint⁴

⁴ Plaintiff annexed exhibits to the complaint. Dkt. No. 1-1. To the extent that the exhibits are relevant to the incidents described in the complaint, the Court will consider the complaint as well as any documents attached as exhibits. See *Cortec Indus., Inc. v. Sum Holding L.P.*, 949 F.2d 42, 47 (2d Cir. 1991) (the complaint is deemed to include any written instrument attached to it as an exhibit or any statements or documents incorporated in it by reference).

Plaintiff brings this action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which establishes a cause of action for “the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the

Constitution and laws’ of the United States.” *German v. Fed. Home Loan Mortgage Corp.*, 885 F. Supp. 537, 573 (S.D.N.Y. 1995) (citing *Wilder v. Virginia Hosp. Ass’n*, 496 U.S. 498, 508 (1990) (quoting 42 U.S.C. § 1983)) (footnote omitted); see also *Myers v. Wollowitz*, No. 6:95-CV-0272 (TJM/RWS), 1995 WL 236245, at *2 (N.D.N.Y. Apr. 10, 1995) (stating that “§ 1983 is the vehicle by which individuals may seek redress for alleged violations of their constitutional rights.” (citation omitted)). “Section 1983 itself creates no substantive rights, [but] ... only a procedure for redress for the deprivation of rights established elsewhere.” *Sykes v. James*, 13 F.3d 515, 519 (2d Cir. 1993) (citation omitted). The Court will construe the allegations in plaintiff’s complaint with the utmost leniency. See, e.g., *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 521 (1972) (holding that a pro se litigant’s complaint is to be held “to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.”).

*3 Plaintiff, an inmate currently being held at Mid-State Correctional Facility (“Mid-State C.F.”), asserts claims arising out of his confinement in the custody of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (“DOCCS”). The incidents that form the foundation for this complaint occurred while plaintiff was confined at Elmira Correctional Facility (“Elmira C.F.”). See Compl., generally. On July 13, 2013, plaintiff filed a grievance claiming that defendants Officer Copestick (“Copestick”) and Officer Schieber (“Schieber”) harassed him, on more than one occasion, about his medication. See *id.* at 6; see Dkt. No. 1-1 at 3-5. On August 5, 2013, after an investigation into the allegations, the Superintendent of Elmira C.F. denied plaintiff’s grievance. See Dkt. No. 1-1 at 5.

On September 30, 2013, plaintiff was on his way to the masjid to participate in Ramadan when he was stopped by Copestick and Schieber and directed to the wall for a pat-frisk. See Compl. at 5. While plaintiff’s hands were on the wall, Schieber “violently kicked” his legs from underneath him. See *id.* Schieber “stomped” on plaintiff’s ankles while Copestick attempted to choke plaintiff. See *id.* During the assault, the officers yelled racial slurs. See *id.* Defendant Sergeant Collerman (“Collerman”) watched the officers beat plaintiff. See Compl. at 5. As a result of the attack, plaintiff’s eyeglasses were broken, his ankle was swollen, and he could not walk. See *id.* at 5, 9.

At approximately 5:00 p.m., plaintiff received medical treatment for complaints of pain in his right big toe and swelling in his right foot. See Dkt. No. 1-1 at 19. Plaintiff

received [Motrin](#) and was advised to follow with sick call requests, if needed. *See id.* A “use of force/inmate injury” report was compiled.⁵ *See id.* At approximately 7:15 p.m., plaintiff, a diabetic, told a medical provider that he had not received his daily “medication.” *See id.* The provider ordered various medications to be delivered to plaintiff on a daily basis. *See id.*

⁵ The Use of Force report was not annexed as an exhibit to the complaint.

On October 1, 2013, plaintiff received a misbehavior report charging him with assault on staff and with refusing a direct order and search.⁶ *See* Compl. at 5. On the same day, plaintiff was placed in confinement in the Special Housing Unit (“SHU”). *See* Dkt. No. 1-1 at 19. On October 3, 2013, plaintiff attended a Hearing regarding the misbehavior report.⁷ *See* Dkt. No. 1-1 at 10. On November 3, 2013, plaintiff received a copy of the hearing disposition dismissing all charges. *See* Dkt. No. 1-1 at 11; Dkt. No. 1 at 5.

⁶ The name of the officer who served the misbehavior report is not clearly legible on the Hearing Disposition annexed as an exhibit. *See* Dkt. No. 1-1 at 10. Plaintiff does not allege that Copestick, Schieber, or Collerman delivered the report. The disposition form indicates that the charges were reported by Schieber. *Id.* The misbehavior report was not annexed as an exhibit to the complaint.

⁷ The officer who presided over the hearing was a Captain at Elmira C.F. However, the name of the hearing officer is not clearly legible. *See* Dkt. No. 1-1 at 10-11.

On November 3, 2013, plaintiff was released from the SHU. *See* Compl. at 5. While plaintiff was in the SHU, he was unable to participate in Ramadan, denied religious meals, denied parole, and excluded from mental health programs. *See id.*

Construed liberally, the complaint contains the following claims: (1) Copestick and Schieber violated plaintiff's Eighth Amendment rights with use of excessive force (Fifth, Fifteenth, Twentieth, and Twenty-Second Causes of Action); (2) Collerman failed to protect plaintiff from the assault in violation of plaintiff's Eighth Amendment rights (Fifteenth Cause of Action); (3) defendants were deliberately

indifferent to plaintiff's serious medical needs in violation of the Eighth Amendment (Sixth, Seventh, and Fifteenth Causes of Action); (4) Copestick and Schieber retaliated against plaintiff in violation of plaintiff's First Amendment rights (Twenty-First Cause of Action); (5) plaintiff's First Amendment rights to religious freedom were violated (Fourth Cause of Action); (6) plaintiff's Fourteenth Amendment rights to due process and equal protection were violated (First, Second, Third, Sixth, Sixteenth, and Eighteenth Causes of Action); (7) defendants failed to investigate plaintiff's complaints and follow grievance procedures (Tenth and Thirteenth Causes of Action); (8) perjury claims against officers who filed the misbehavior report (Eleventh and Seventeenth Causes of Action); and (9) supervisory claims against DOCCS (Eighth, Ninth, Twelfth, Fourteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-Third, Twenty-Fourth, Twenty-Fifth, and Twenty Sixth Causes of Action). *See* Compl., *generally*. Plaintiff seeks compensatory damages, injunctive relief, and criminal charges against defendants (Eleventh and Seventeenth Causes of Action). *See* Compl. at 9-13.

V. Analysis

A. Eleventh Amendment

*4 The Eleventh Amendment has long been construed as barring a citizen from bringing a suit against his or her own state in federal court, under the fundamental principle of “sovereign immunity.” [U.S. Const. amend. XI](#) (“The Judicial power of the United States shall not be construed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by Citizens of another State, or by Citizens or Subjects of any Foreign State.”); [Hans v. Louisiana](#), 134 U.S. 1, 10-21 (1890); [Idaho v. Coeur d'Alene Tribe of Idaho](#), 521 U.S. 261, 267 (1997); [Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman](#), 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984). Eleventh Amendment immunity is lost only if Congress unequivocally abrogates states' immunity or a state expressly consents to suit. [Gollomp v. Spitzer](#), 568 F.3d 355, 365-66 (2d Cir. 2009). It is well-settled that Congress did not abrogate states' immunity through [42 U.S.C. § 1983](#), *see Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 343-45 (1979), and that New York State has not waived its immunity from suit on the claims asserted in plaintiff's complaint. *See generally Trotman v. Palisades Interstate Park Comm'n*, 557 F.2d 35, 38-40 (2d Cir. 1977); [Dawkins v. State of New York](#), No. 93-CV-1298 (RSP/GJD), 1996 WL 156764 at *2 (N.D.N.Y. 1996).

Here, insofar as plaintiff seeks an award of money damages pursuant to [Section 1983](#) against DOCCS, those claims are

dismissed as plaintiff seeks relief from a defendant immune from suit under section 1983. See *LeGrand v. Evan*, 702 F.2d 415, 417 (2d Cir. 1983); see *Meehan v. Kenville*, 555 Fed.Appx. 116 (2d Cir. 2014); see *Simmons v. Gowanda Corr. Facility*, No. 13-CV-0647, 2013 WL 3340646, at *1 (W.D.N.Y. July 1, 2013) (“the New York State Department of Corrections and [the named correctional facility] enjoy the same Eleventh Amendment immunity from suit in federal court as enjoyed by the state itself”) (quoting *Posr. v. Court Officer Shield No. 207*, 180 F.3d 409, 411 (2d Cir. 1999)).

B. Eighth Amendment

1. Excessive Force Claims

The Eighth Amendment protects prisoners from “cruel and unusual punishment” at the hands of prison officials. *Wilson v. Seiter*, 501 U.S. 294, 296-97 (1991); *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 104 (1976). The Eighth Amendment’s prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment encompasses the use of excessive force against an inmate, who must prove two components: (1) subjectively, that the defendant acted wantonly and in bad faith, and (2) objectively, that the defendant’s actions violated “contemporary standards of decency.” *Blyden v. Mancusi*, 186 F.3d 252, 262-63 (2d Cir. 1999) (internal quotations omitted) (citing *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 8 (1992)). The key inquiry into a claim of excessive force is “whether force was applied in a good-faith effort to maintain or restore discipline, or maliciously and sadistically to cause harm.” *Hudson*, 503 U.S. at 7 (citing *Whitley v. Albers*, 475 U.S. 312, 321-22 (1986)); see also *Johnson v. Glick*, 481 F.2d 1028, 1033 (2d Cir. 1973); see also *Wilkins v. Gaddy*, 559 U.S. 34, 37 (2010) (per curiam) (“[t]he Supreme Court has emphasized that the nature of the force applied is the core judicial inquiry in excessive force cases—not whether a certain quantum of injury was sustained.”). “Accordingly, when considering the subjective element of the governing Eighth Amendment test, a court must be mindful that the absence of serious injury, though relevant, does not necessarily negate a finding of wantonness.” *Wynter v. Ramey*, No. 11-CV-0257 (DNH/DEP), 2013 W L 5465343, at *5 (N.D.N.Y. Sept. 30, 2013) (citations omitted).

Plaintiff has identified the time, location and individuals involved in the alleged assault. Thus, the Court finds that plaintiff’s Eighth Amendment excessive force claims against Copestick and Schieber survive sua sponte review and require a response. In so ruling, the Court expresses no opinion as to

whether these claims can withstand a properly filed motion to dismiss or for summary judgment.

2. Failure To Intervene

*5 The failure of corrections officers to employ reasonable measures to protect an inmate from violence by others may rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation. See *Ayers v. Coughlin*, 780 F.2d 205, 209 (2d Cir. 1985). Moreover, allegations that an officer failed to intervene and prevent assaults are sufficient to state an Eighth Amendment failure to protect claim. See *Rogers v. Artus*, No. 13-CV-21, 2013 WL 5175570, at *3 (W.D.N.Y. Sept. 11, 2013). To establish liability under a failure to intervene theory, a plaintiff must prove the use of excessive force by someone other than the individual and that the defendant under consideration: 1) possessed actual knowledge of the use by another of excessive force; 2) had a realistic opportunity to intervene and prevent the harm from occurring; and 3) nonetheless disregarded that risk by intentionally refusing or failing to take reasonable measures to end the use of excessive force. *Curley v. Vill. of Suffern*, 268 F.3d 65, 72 (2d Cir. 2001). In order to succeed on a claim of failure to protect, the inmate “must establish both that a substantial risk to his safety actually existed and that the offending [defendant] knew of and consciously disregarded that risk.” See *Walsh v. Goord*, No. 07-CV-0246, 2007 WL 1572146, at *9 (W.D.N.Y. May 23, 2007) (quoting *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 837 (1970)). In addition, a failure-to-protect claim requires a showing that prison officials acted with “deliberate indifference” to the inmate’s safety. *Morales v. New York State Dep’t of Corr.*, 842 F.2d 27, 30 (2d Cir. 1988).

At this early stage of the proceeding, plaintiff has alleged enough to require a response from Collerman to plaintiff’s claim that he failed to protect plaintiff from the assault by Copestick and Schieber. In so ruling, the Court expresses no opinion as to whether these claims can withstand a properly filed motion to dismiss or for summary judgment.

3. Deliberate Indifference to Serious Medical Needs

To state an Eighth Amendment claim for medical indifference, a plaintiff must allege that the defendant was deliberately indifferent to a serious medical need. See *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994). The objective component of an Eighth Amendment deliberate indifference

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medical claim “requires that the alleged deprivation must be sufficiently serious, in the sense that a condition of urgency, one that may produce death, degeneration, or extreme pain exists.” *Hill v. Curcione*, 657 F.3d 116, 122 (2d Cir. 2011) (quoting *Hathaway v. Coughlin*, 99 F.3d 550, 553 (2d Cir. 1996)) (internal quotation marks omitted). Under the subjective element, medical mistreatment rises to the level of deliberate indifference only when it “involves culpable recklessness, i.e., an act or a failure to act ... that evinces ‘a conscious disregard of a substantial risk of serious harm.’ ” *Chance v. Armstrong*, 143 F. 3d 698, 703 (2d Cir. 1998) (quoting *Hathaway*, 99 F.3d at 553). “Deliberate indifference requires more than negligence but less than conduct undertaken for the very purpose of causing harm.” *Hathaway v. Coughlin*, 37 F.3d 63, 66 (2d Cir. 1994). To assert a claim for deliberate indifference, an inmate must allege that (1) a prison medical care provider was aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that the inmate had a serious medical need; and (2) the medical care provider actually drew that inference. *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 837; *Chance*, 143 F.3d at 702. The inmate must also demonstrate that the provider consciously and intentionally disregarded or ignored that serious medical need. *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 835. An “inadvertent failure to provide adequate medical care” does not constitute “deliberate indifference.” *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 105-06.

In this instance, even assuming plaintiff's injuries were sufficiently serious, plaintiff must allege facts to demonstrate that defendants acted with a sufficiently culpable state of mind. See *Hathaway*, 99 F.3d at 553. Plaintiff claims that his medical treatment was inadequate because his ankle was not x-rayed until he was transferred to “his next facility,” two months after the alleged incident. See Compl. at 10. “When the basis of a prisoner's Eighth Amendment claim is a temporary delay or interruption in the provision of otherwise adequate medical treatment, it is appropriate to focus on the challenged delay or interruption in treatment rather than the prisoner's underlying medical condition alone in analyzing whether the alleged deprivation is, in ‘objective terms, sufficiently serious,’ to support an Eighth Amendment claim.” *Smith v. Carpenter*, 316 F.3d 178, 185 (2d Cir. 2003) (citing *Chance*, 143 F.3d at 702). “Although a delay in providing necessary medical care may in some cases constitute deliberate indifference, this Court has reserved such a classification for cases in which, for example, officials deliberately delayed care as a form of punishment, ignored a ‘life-threatening and fast-degenerating’ condition for three days; or delayed major surgery for over two years.” *Demata*

v. New York State Corr. Dep't of Health Servs., 198 F.3d 233 (2d Cir. 1999) (internal citations omitted).

*6 Here, the complaint is void of any facts establishing that any defendant deliberately delayed plaintiff's medical treatment. On the day of the alleged attack, plaintiff received medical attention and prescription medication. See Dkt. No. 1-1 at 19. Plaintiff was treated on three other occasions in October 2013 for foot pain before undergoing x-rays on November 14, 2013. Dkt. No. 1-1 at 20-21. During those visits, plaintiff received ice packs, *Motrin*, and refused *Ibuprofen*. See id. Plaintiff does not allege that his condition deteriorated during that time. See *Rodriguez v. City of New York*, 802 F.Supp. 477, 482 (S.D.N.Y. 2011) (finding that the plaintiff did not establish that his condition worsened as a result of a delay between his request and receipt of medical attention). Plaintiff does not allege that he sought and was refused medical treatment during this two month time period. See *Kee v. Hasty*, No. 01 Civ. 2123, 2004 W L 807071, at *29 (S.D.N.Y. April 14, 2004) (holding that the plaintiff's Eighth Amendment claims were overly conclusory because the inmate failed to specify the dates on which he was denied proper treatment, the nature of his needs on those dates, and the nature of the treatment that was purportedly denied by the defendants). The complaint lacks any facts to plausibly suggest that any defendant knew of the severity of plaintiff's injury and the risk posed by any delay in his treatment.

Plaintiff, a diabetic, also claims that he was unable to read or see for over one year because his eye glasses were not replaced until over a year after the assault. See Compl. at 10. The complaint does not contain any facts suggesting that plaintiff made any complaints or sick call requests to any defendant related to his eyeglasses. Plaintiff also failed to assert facts suggesting that he made any defendant “aware of the serious harm could occur” if he was not provided with his glasses. See *Myrie v. Calvo/Calvoba*, 591 F.Supp.2d 620, 628 (S.D.N.Y. 2008) (holding that the complaint did not suggest that any defendant was deliberately indifferent to the plaintiff's vision problems).

Plaintiff's Eighth Amendment allegations are also subject to dismissal based upon the failure to plead personal involvement on the part of any defendant. It is well settled in this Circuit that “personal involvement of defendants in alleged constitutional deprivations is a prerequisite to an award of damages under § 1983.” *Wright v. Smith*, 21 F.3d 496, 501 (2d Cir. 1994) (quoting *Moffitt v. Town of Brookfield*, 950 F.2d 880, 885 (2d Cir. 1991)). Thus, “a Section 1983

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plaintiff must ‘allege a tangible connection between the acts of the defendant and the injuries suffered.’ ” *Austin v. Pappas*, No. 04-CV-7263, 2008 W L 857528, at *2 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 31, 2008) (quoting *Bass v. Jackson*, 790 F.2d 260, 263 (2d Cir. 1986)) (other citation omitted). The complaint lacks any facts suggesting that Copestick, Schieber, or Collerman were involved in plaintiff’s medical treatment or refused to allow plaintiff to receive medical attention. In the absence of factual allegations sufficient to plausibly suggest that any defendant was personally involved, the complaint fails to state a cognizable claim against him. Consequently, plaintiff’s Eighth Amendment claims for deliberate indifference to plaintiff’s medical needs are dismissed without prejudice pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) for failure to state a claim.

C. First Amendment

1. Retaliation

Plaintiff alleges that Copestick and Schieber assaulted him in retaliation for plaintiff’s grievance against them. *See* Compl. at 6,13. To state a claim of retaliation under the First Amendment, a plaintiff must allege facts plausibly suggesting the following: (1) the speech or conduct at issue was “protected;” (2) the defendants took “adverse action” against the plaintiff – namely, action that would deter a similarly situated individual of ordinary firmness from exercising his or her constitutional rights; and (3) there was a causal connection between the protected speech and the adverse action – in other words, that the protected conduct was a “substantial or motivating factor” in the defendant’s decision to take action against the plaintiff. *Mount Healthy City Sch. Dist. Bd. of Educ. v. Doyle*, 429 U.S. 274, 287 (1977); *Gill v. Pidlypchak*, 389 F.3d 379, 380 (2d Cir. 2004) (citing *Dawes v. Walker*, 239 F.3d 489, 492 (2d Cir. 2001)). The Second Circuit has stated that courts must approach prisoner retaliation claims “with skepticism and particular care,” since “virtually any adverse action taken against a prisoner by a prison official – even those otherwise not rising to the level of a constitutional violation – can be characterized as a constitutionally proscribed retaliatory act.” *Dawes*, 239 F.3d at 491, *overruled on other grounds by Swierkiewicz v. Sorema N.A.*, 534 U.S. 506 (2002) (citing *Flaherty v. Coughlin*, 713 F.2d 10, 13 (2d Cir. 1983)); *Franco v. Kelly*, 854 F.2d 584, 590 (2d Cir. 1988).

*7 It is well-settled that filing a grievance is constitutionally protected conduct. *Johnson v. Eggersdorf*, 8 Fed.Appx. 140, 144 (2d Cir. 2001); *Graham v. R.J. Henderson*, 89 F.3d 75, 80 (2d Cir. 1996). A plaintiff can establish a causal connection that suggests retaliatory intent by showing that his protected activity was close in time to the complained-of adverse action. *Espinal v. Goord*, 558 F.3d 119, 129 (2d Cir. 2001) (citations omitted). While there is no “bright line” defining the limits of the temporal relationship, courts in the Circuit have held that an adverse action taken within three months after a protected activity can reasonably be perceived as retaliatory. *See Gorman-Bakos v. Cornell Coop. Extn. of Schenectady Cty.*, 252 F.3d 545, 554 (2d Cir. 2001); *see also Ashok v. Barnhart*, No. 01-CV-1311, 289 F.Supp.2d 305, 314 (E.D.N.Y. Oct. 30, 2003) (the interval between a protected activity and an adverse action that results in a finding of retaliation is generally no more than several months).

At this juncture, the Court finds that plaintiff’s retaliation claims against Copestick and Schieber survive sua sponte review and require a response. In so ruling, the Court expresses no opinion as to whether these claims can withstand a properly filed motion to dismiss or for summary judgment.

2. Religious Claims

Plaintiff alleges that the defendants violated his religious rights because he was unable to participate in Ramadan and denied his religious meals as a direct result of the false misbehavior report. Dkt. No. 1 at 5-6.

Prisoners have long been understood to retain some measure of the constitutional protection afforded by the First Amendment’s Free Exercise Clause. *See Ford v. McGinnis*, 352 F.3d 582, 588 (2d Cir. 2003) (citing *Pell v. Procunier*, 417 U.S. 817, 822 (1974)). “Balanced against the constitutional protections afforded prison inmates, including the right to free exercise of religion, [however,] are the interests of prison officials charged with complex duties arising from administration of the penal system.” *Id.* (citing *Benjamin v. Coughlin*, 905 F.2d 571, 574 (2d Cir. 1990)). To state a First Amendment Free Exercise claim, a plaintiff must allege that (1) the practice asserted is religious in the person’s scheme of beliefs, and that the belief is sincerely held; (2) the challenged practice of the prison officials infringes upon the religious belief; and (3) the challenged practice of the prison officials furthers some legitimate penological objective. *Farid v. Smith*, 850 F.2d 917, 926 (2d Cir.

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1988) (citations omitted). A prisoner “must show at the threshold that the disputed conduct substantially burdens his sincerely held religious beliefs.” *Salahuddin v. Goord*, 467 F.3d 263, 274–75 (2d Cir. 2006) (citing *Ford*, 352 F.3d at 591).⁸ A religious belief is “sincerely held” when the plaintiff subjectively, sincerely holds a particular belief that is religious in nature. *Ford*, 352 F.3d at 590. A prisoner’s sincerely held religious belief is “substantially burdened” where “the state puts substantial pressure on an adherent to modify his behavior and to violate his beliefs.” *Jolly v. Coughlin*, 76 F.3d 468, 476–77 (2d Cir. 1996). Once a plaintiff establishes that a sincerely held religious belief has been substantially burdened, “[t]he defendants then bear the relatively limited burden of identifying the legitimate penological interests that justify the impinging conduct; the burden remains with the prisoner to show that these articulated concerns were irrational.” *Salahuddin*, 467 F.3d at 275 (quoting *Ford*, 352 F.3d at 595) (punctuation omitted).

⁸ The Second Circuit has yet to decide whether the “substantial burden” test survived the Supreme Court’s decision in *Emp’t Div. v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872, 887 (1990), in which the Court suggested that application of the test “puts courts in ‘the unacceptable business of evaluating the relative merits of differing religious claims.’” *Ford*, 352 F.3d at 592 (quoting *Emp’t Div.*, 494 U.S. at 887); see also *Williams v. Does*, 639 Fed.Appx. 55, 56 (2d Cir. May 6, 2016) (“We have not yet decided whether a prisoner asserting a free-exercise claim must, as a threshold requirement, show that the disputed conduct substantially burdened his sincerely held religious beliefs.”); *Holland v. Goord*, 758 F.3d 215, 220-21 (2d Cir. 2014) (declining to decide whether a prisoner must show, as a threshold matter, that the defendants’ conduct substantially burdened his sincerely held religious beliefs in connection with a First Amendment free exercise claim). In the absence of any controlling precedent to the contrary, I have applied the substantial-burden test in this matter.

*8 In this case, plaintiff has not alleged who issued the misbehavior report and it is not attached to the complaint. An inmate “has no general constitutional right to be free from being falsely accused in a misbehavior report.” *Boddie v. Schneider*, 105 F.3d 857, 862 (2d Cir. 1997). While a false misbehavior report may give rise to a claim under § 1983 “when done in retaliation for the exercise of a

constitutional right,” *Willey v. Kirkpatrick*, 801 F.3d 51, 63 (2d Cir. 2015), here there is no such allegation. While the deprivation of religious meals in SHU may be sufficient to state a claim, see *Williams v. Does*, 639 Fed.Appx. 55, 56 (2d Cir. 2016); *Skates v. Shusda*, No. 9:14-CV-1092 (TJM/DEP), 2016 WL 3882530, at **4-5 (N.D.N.Y. May 31, 2016), here there is no indication that the defendants had any personal involvement in that conduct. The allegations, without more, fail to plausibly suggest that any defendant burdened plaintiff’s right to freely practice his religion. Thus, plaintiff’s First Amendment claims against are dismissed without prejudice pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

D. Fourteenth Amendment

1. Equal Protection/Discrimination

Plaintiff claims that the September 30, 2013 assault was racially motivated. See Compl. at 6, 12. “When verbal harassment and simultaneous physical abuse ... are considered together, [courts] have little doubt concluding that plaintiff’s allegations [are] sufficient to state a § 1983 claim for discrimination on the basis of race. *Cole v. Fischer*, 379 Fed.Appx. 40, 43 (2d Cir. 2010). “Under the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection clause, a plaintiff may be able to recover for a physical assault that would not meet the objective threshold for Eighth Amendment excessive force claims, if the defendant’s conduct was motivated by racial or religious discrimination.” *Bhuiyan v. Wright*, No. 9:06-CV-409 ATB, 2011 WL 1870235, at *9 (N.D.N.Y. May 13, 2011) (citation omitted).

At this juncture, plaintiff has sufficiently plead a Fourteenth Amendment equal protection claim to warrant a response from Copestick and Schieber. In so ruling, the Court expresses no opinion as to whether these claims can withstand a properly filed motion to dismiss or for summary judgment.

2. Due Process

Plaintiff claims that defendants violated his due process rights when they failed to replace plaintiff’s eyeglasses. See Compl. at 10. Plaintiff also asserts that his Fourteenth Amendment rights were violated because he was improperly confined to the SHU without a hearing as a result of a

false misbehavior report. *See id.* at 10. During his SHU confinement, was allegedly unable to participate in Ramadan, denied his religious meals, denied parole, and excluded from mental health programs. *See id.*

a. Property Claim

The Supreme Court has held that the negligent or intentional deprivation of prisoner's property may not be the basis for constitutional claims if sufficient post deprivation remedies are available to address the claim. *Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 531 (1984) (citing *Parratt v. Taylor*, 451 U.S. 527, 541 (1981)); *Davis v. New York*, 311 Fed.Appx. 397, 400 (2d Cir. 2009) (An alleged loss of property, “whether intentional or negligent – will not support a due process claim redressable under § 1983 if ‘adequate state post-deprivation remedies are available.’”) (quoting *Hudson*, 468 U.S. 533). “New York in fact affords an adequate post-deprivation remedy in the form of, *inter alia*, a Court of Claims action.” *Jackson v. Burke*, 256 F.3d 93, 96 (2d Cir. 2001). Because plaintiff has access to adequate state law remedies, he has not been deprived of property without due process of law and therefore cannot state a claim for relief pursuant to Section 1983. *See Love v. Coughlin*, 714 F.2d 207, 208-09 (2d Cir. 1983) (per curiam); *see also Aziz Zarif Shabazz v. Pico*, 994 F.Supp. 360, 473-74 (S.D.N.Y. 1998) (dismissing the plaintiff's claim that defendants destroyed his eyeglasses in violation of his due process rights). Thus, plaintiff's due process claims related to his eyeglasses are dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

b. SHU Confinement

*9 To establish a due process claim, plaintiff must establish: “(1) that he possessed a liberty interest and (2) that the defendant(s) deprived him of that interest as a result of insufficient process.” *Giano v. Selsky*, 238 F.3d 223, 225 (2d Cir. 2001) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted). In this case plaintiff alleges that the false misbehavior report resulted in a SHU sentence.⁹

⁹ The complaint contains conflicting factual allegations related to the length of plaintiff's SHU confinement. Plaintiff claims that after “one month of being housed in SHU,” he was released. *See*

Compl. at 5. In the Third Cause of Action, plaintiff claims that he served “over 60 days in SHU.” *See id.* at 9.

A prisoner “has a liberty interest that is implicated by SHU confinement if it ‘imposes [an] atypical and significant hardship on the inmate in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison life.’” *J.S. v. T’Kach*, 714 F.3d 99, 106 (2d Cir. 2013) (quoting *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 484, (1995)); *see also Palmer v. Richards*, 364 F.3d 60, 64 (2d Cir. 2004). In making this determination courts are to consider, “among other things, the duration and conditions of confinement.” *J.S.*, 714 F.3d at 106; *Davis v. Barrett*, 576 F.3d 129, 133 (2d Cir. 2009). The conditions of confinement are to be considered “in comparison to the hardships endured by prisoners in general population, as well as prisoners in administrative and protective confinement, assuming such confinements are imposed in the ordinary course of prison administration.” *Davis*, 576 F.3d at 134; *Palmer*, 364 F.3d at 66 n.4.

Although the Second Circuit has “explicitly avoided” creating “a bright line rule that a certain period of SHU confinement automatically fails to implicate due process rights,” the Court has established guidelines. *Palmer*, 364 F.3d at 65. Where the plaintiff is confined for “an intermediate duration –between 101 and 305 days – ‘development of a detailed record’ of the conditions of the confinement relative to ordinary prison conditions is required.” *Id.* (quoting *Colon v. Howard*, 215 F.3d 227, 234 (2d Cir. 2000)). While confinements for less than 101 days “under normal SHU conditions may not implicate a prisoner's liberty interest,” such confinements “could constitute atypical and significant hardships if the conditions were more severe than the normal SHU conditions of *Sealy* or a more fully developed record showed that even relatively brief confinements under normal SHU conditions were, in fact, atypical.” *Palmer*, 364 F.3d at 65; *see Davis*, 576 F.3d at 133.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Second Circuit has noted that “[i]n the absence of a detailed factual record, we have affirmed dismissal of due process claims only in cases where the period of time spent in SHU was exceedingly short—less than the 30 days that the *Sandin* plaintiff spent in SHU—and there was no indication that the plaintiff endured unusual SHU conditions.” *Palmer*, 364 F.3d at 65-66; *see Davis*, 576 F.3d at 133. Absent allegations in the complaint that the conditions of confinement were in some way

atypical, however, many courts in this Circuit have granted motions to dismiss claims by plaintiffs with confinement exceeding thirty days when the plaintiffs failed to allege that the conditions of confinement were in some way atypical. *See, e.g., Acevedo v. Fischer*, No. 12-CV-6866, 2014 WL 5015470 at *15 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 29, 2014) (citing cases involving confinements of between forty and fifty days which were dismissed for failure to allege a protected liberty interest because there were no allegations of unusual confinement).

*10 In this case, the duration of the confinement, 30 to 60 days, “was not long enough to constitute an atypical and significant deprivation by itself,” and the Court therefore must “look to the conditions of confinement.” *Palmer*, 364 F.3d at 66; *see also Davis*, 576 F.3d at 133. Plaintiff claims that while he was confined in the SHU, he was unable to participate in Ramadan, denied his religious meals, denied parole, and excluded from his mental health program. *See* Compl. at 5, 10; Dkt. No. 1-1 at 1.

It is well established that prisoners do not have a constitutional right to parole. *Greenholtz v. Inmates of Neb. Penal & Corr. Complex*, 442 U.S. 1, 7 (1979). “Where a state has created a statutory scheme for parole, the Due Process Clause protects prisoners insofar as they ‘have a legitimate expectancy of release that is grounded in the state’s statutory scheme.’ ” *Barna v. Travis*, 239 F.3d 169, 170–72 (2d Cir. 2001) (per curiam) (citing *Greenholtz*, 442 U.S. at 11–13). “New York’s parole scheme is not one that creates in any prisoner a legitimate expectancy of release.” *Barna*, 239 F.3d at 171. Plaintiff has also failed to plead that his inability to participate in mental health programs impacted a protected liberty interest. *See Nieves v. Prack*, No. 6:15-CV-6101, 2016 WL 1165820, at *4 (W.D.N.Y. March 24, 2016) (“[Plaintiff’s] claim that his inability ... to participate in various educational, vocational, rehabilitative or self-help programs might have hindered his ability to receive an early parole or release is ... speculative and fails to allege interference with a protected liberty interest.”) (citations omitted). Here, the complaint lacks facts establishing when, how many times, and who deprived plaintiff of the right to attend his mental health program. With respect to plaintiff’s religious claims, courts have found that the deprivation of communal religious services does not constitute an atypical and significant hardship. *See Arce v. Walker*, 139 F.3d 329, 336 (2d Cir. 1998) (finding that eighteen days in administrative segregation, including loss of exercise and access to religious services, did not constitute atypical and significant hardship); *Holland v.*

Goord, No. 05-CV-6295, 2006 WL 1983382, at *7 (W.D.N.Y. July 13, 2006) (holding the inability to attend Muslim services and celebrate the end of Ramadan while confined in the SHU for seventy-seven days is not an atypical hardship).

Even assuming that plaintiff had pled facts sufficient to show that his confinement imposed an atypical and significant hardship, however, and therefore pled the existence of a valid liberty interest, the complaint fails to state a claim based upon the Fourteenth Amendment and due process. It is well settled that “a prison inmate has no general constitutional right to be free from being falsely accused in a misbehavior report.” *Boddie v. Schnieder*, 105 F.3d 857, 862 (2d Cir. 1997) (citing *Freeman v. Rideout*, 808 F.2d 949, 951 (2d Cir. 1986)). In this case, a hearing regarding the charges was held within two days of plaintiff’s receipt of the misbehavior report. Plaintiff does not allege that he was denied any procedural due process during that hearing. Moreover, the complaint lacks facts suggesting that any named defendant issued the misbehavior report or presided over the disciplinary hearings. Based upon the aforementioned, plaintiff’s Fourteenth Amendment claims are dismissed without prejudice pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. *See Livingston v. Kelly*, 561 F.Supp.2d 329, 332 (W.D.N.Y. 2008) (dismissing plaintiff’s false-report claims because the plaintiff failed to allege that the disciplinary hearings on the reports did not meet constitutional due process standards).

E. Failure to Respond to Grievances and Failure to Investigate

*11 Plaintiff also claims that his constitutional rights were violated because the facility grievance program is “never followed.” *See* Compl. at 11. There is no constitutional right of access to the established inmate grievance program. *Davis v. Buffardi*, No. 9:01-CV-0285 (PAM/GJD), 2005 WL 1174088, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. May 4, 2005) (“[p]articipation in an inmate grievance process is not a constitutionally protected right”); *Shell v. Brzezniak*, 365 F.Supp.2d 362, 369-70 (W.D.N.Y. 2005) (“[i]nmate grievance programs created by state law are not required by the Constitution and consequently allegations that prison officials violated those procedures does not give rise to a cognizable § 1983 claim”); *Cancel v. Goord*, No. 00. Civ. 2042, 2001 WL 303713, at *3 (S.D.N.Y. Mar. 29, 2001) (“inmate grievance procedures are not required by the Constitution and therefore a violation of such procedures does not give rise to a claim under § 1983”); *Mimms v. Carr*, No. 09-CV-5740, 2011 WL 2360059, at *10 (E.D.N.Y. June 9, 2011) (“It is well-established that

prison grievance procedures do not create a due-process-protected liberty interest.”) (citing cases). Simply stated, there is no underlying constitutional obligation to afford an inmate meaningful access to the internal grievance procedure, or to investigate and properly determine any such grievance.

To the extent that plaintiff attempts to assert a separate constitutional claim based upon the Inspector General's failure to investigate, the law is also clear that inmates do not enjoy a constitutional right to an investigation of any kind by government officials. *Bernstein v. New York*, 591 F.Supp.2d 448, 460 (S.D.N.Y. 2008) (collecting cases); *Torres v. Mazzuca*, 246 F.Supp.2d 334, 341-42 (S.D.N.Y. 2003) (Prisoners do not have a due process right to a thorough investigation of grievances.); *DeShaney v. Winnebago Soc. Servs.*, 489 U.S. 189, 196 (1989) (The Due Process Clause confers no right to governmental aid, even where that aid may be necessary to secure life, liberty, or property interests of which the government itself may not deprive the individual); *Pine v. Seally*, No. 9:09-CV-1198, 2011 W L 856426, at *9 (N.D.N.Y. Feb. 4, 2011) (“the law is ... clear that inmates do not enjoy a constitutional right to an investigation of any kind by government officials”) (citing *Bernstein*, 591 F.Supp.2d at 460).

In this regard, plaintiff's claims do not involve a constitutional violation and are dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

F. Cause of Action for Criminal Charges/Perjury

“New York does not recognize a common law cause of action for [...] perjury.” *Harris v. Summers*, No. 5:14-CV-0013 (LEK/DEP), 2014 W L 1340032, at *5 (N.D.N.Y. Apr. 3, 2014) (citing *Carvel v. Ross*, No. 12-CV-0722, 2011 W L 856283, at *12 (S.D.N.Y. Feb. 16, 2011) (dismissing the plaintiff's perjury claim because “there [is] no private right of action” for perjury)). Moreover, plaintiff's claim is not actionable because it is well-settled that a private citizen does not have a constitutional right to bring a criminal complaint against another individual. *Harper v. New York Child Welfare Comm'rs*, No. 3:12-CV-0646 (NAM/DEP), 2012 WL 3115975, at *4 (N.D.N.Y. May 14, 2012) (citing *Linda R.S. v. Richard D.*, 410 U.S. 614, 619 (1973)). Consequently, plaintiff's request to charge defendants with “perjury” is dismissed for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b).

G. Injunctive Relief Against DOCCS

Plaintiff demands injunctive relief directing DOCCS to require “each officer” to wear body cameras to prevent future assaults and other related injunctive relief. *See* Compl. at 10-12. Plaintiff is presently confined at Mid-State C.F. and therefore, plaintiff's request for injunctive relief involving changes to the operation of security at Elmira C.F., is dismissed as moot. *See Edwards v. Horn*, No. 10 Civ. 6194, 2012 WL 760172, at *23 (S.D.N.Y. March 8, 2012) (dismissing the plaintiff's claim for injunctive relief because the plaintiff had been released from prison).

*12 Even assuming plaintiff's request is broader and intended to encompass all DOCCS facilities, the request is nonetheless improper and subject to dismissal. The PLRA provides “[p]rospective relief in any civil action with respect to prison conditions shall extend no further than necessary to correct the violation of the Federal right of the particular plaintiff.” 18 U.S.C. § 3626(a)(1)(A). “[A] proposed order directing the installation of securities cameras – is beyond the narrow scope permitted by the PLRA.” *Barrington v. New York*, 806 F.Supp.2d 730, 750 (S.D.N.Y. 2011) (dismissing the plaintiff's request for injunctive relief seeking an order directing Green Haven to install security cameras as overly broad and unnecessary to correct the alleged past violations of his rights). Accordingly, plaintiff's request for injunctive relief is dismissed.

VI. Conclusion

ORDERED that plaintiff's in forma pauperis application (Dkt. No. 2) is **GRANTED**;¹¹ and it is further

¹¹ Plaintiff should note that, although the Court has granted his application to proceed in forma pauperis, he will still be required to pay fees that he may incur in this action, including copying and/or witness fees.

ORDERED that the Clerk provide the Superintendent of the facility, designated by plaintiff as his current location, with a copy of plaintiff's authorization form, and notify the official that this action has been filed and that plaintiff is required to pay the entire statutory filing fee of \$350.00 pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915; and it is further

ORDERED that the Clerk of the Court provide a copy of plaintiff's inmate authorization form to the Financial Deputy of the Clerk's Office; and it is further

ORDERED that the following claims are **DISMISSED with prejudice** pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted: (1) plaintiff's § 1983 claims for monetary damages against DOCCS; (2) constitutional claims based upon the failure to adhere to the grievance policy and investigate; and (3) plaintiff's claims related to perjury and filing criminal charges against defendants; and it is further

ORDERED that the following claims are **DISMISSED without prejudice** pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted: (1) Eighth Amendment claims against defendants for deliberate indifference to plaintiff's serious medical needs; (2) First Amendment freedom of religion claims; (3) Fourteenth Amendment due process claims; and (4) claims for injunctive relief against DOCCS¹²; and it is further

¹² If plaintiff wishes to pursue any claim dismissed without prejudice, he is advised to that, if accepted for filing, any amended complaint will entirely replace the original complaint and incorporation of prior claims is not permitted.

ORDERED that DOCCS is **DISMISSED** as a defendant herein; and it is further

ORDERED that the following claims survive the Court's sua sponte review under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b) and require a response: (1) the Eighth Amendment use of excessive force claims against defendants Copestick and Schieber; (2) the Eighth Amendment failure-to-intervene claim against defendant Collerman; (3) the First Amendment retaliation claims against defendants Copestick and Schieber; and (3) the Fourteenth Amendment equal protection claims against Copestick and Schieber; and it is further

ORDERED, that the Clerk shall issue summons and forward them, along with copies of the Complaint, to the United States Marshal for service upon the remaining defendants. The Clerk

shall forward a copy of the Summons and Complaint to the Office of the New York State Attorney General, together with a copy of this Decision and Order; and it is further

***13 ORDERED**, that a response to the complaint be filed by the remaining defendants, or their counsel, as provided for in the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure;

ORDERED, that all pleadings, motions and other documents relating to this action must bear the case number assigned to this action and be filed with the Clerk of the United States District Court, Northern District of New York, 7th Floor, Federal Building, 100 S. Clinton St., Syracuse, New York 13261-7367. **Any paper sent by a party to the Court or the Clerk must be accompanied by a certificate showing that a true and correct copy of same was served on all opposing parties or their counsel. Any document received by the Clerk or the Court which does not include a proper certificate of service will be stricken from the docket.** Plaintiff must comply with any requests by the Clerk's Office for any documents that are necessary to maintain this action. All parties must comply with Local Rule 7.1 of the Northern District of New York in filing motions. **Plaintiff is also required to promptly notify the Clerk's Office and all parties or their counsel, in writing, of any change in his address; their failure to do so will result in the dismissal of his action;** and it is further

ORDERED, in accordance with *Lebron v. Sanders*, 557 F.3d 76 (2d Cir. 2009), the Clerk of the Court is directed to provide plaintiff with copies of opinions from Westlaw and the Federal Appendix cited in this Decision and Order; and it is further

ORDERED that the Clerk of the Court shall serve a copy of this Decision and Order on plaintiff in accordance with the Local Rules.

Dated: October 26, 2016.

All Citations

Not Reported in Fed. Supp., 2016 WL 6267968

Filings (1)

Title	PDF	Court	Date	Type
1. Docket 9:16-CV-01009 Houston v. Collman et al	—	N.D.N.Y.	Aug. 15, 2016	Docket

History

There are no History results for this citation.

2023 WL 4935993

Only the Westlaw citation is currently available.
United States District Court, N.D. New York.

Brandon T. MCNAIR, Plaintiff,
v.
UTICA POLICE DEPARTMENT, et al., Defendants.

6:23-CV-699 (DNH/ATB)

|
Signed June 26, 2023

Attorneys and Law Firms

BRANDON T. MCNAIR, Plaintiff, pro se.

ORDER and REPORT-RECOMMENDATION

ANDREW T. BAXTER, United States Magistrate Judge

*1 The Clerk has sent to the court for review a pro se complaint filed by plaintiff Brandon T. McNair, in which he has sued various defendants based on several civil rights claims pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. (Dkt. No. 1) (“Compl.”). Plaintiff has also moved to proceed in forma pauperis (“IFP”). (Dkt. No. 2).

I. IFP Application

Plaintiff declares in his IFP application that he is unable to pay the filing fee. (Dkt. No. 2). After reviewing his application and supporting documents, this court finds that plaintiff is financially eligible for IFP status.

However, in addition to determining whether plaintiff meets the financial criteria to proceed IFP, the court must also consider the sufficiency of the allegations set forth in the complaint in light of 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which provides that the court shall dismiss the case at any time if the court determines that the action is (i) frivolous or malicious; (ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or (iii) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915 (e)(2)(B)(i)-(iii).

In determining whether an action is frivolous, the court must consider whether the complaint lacks an arguable basis in law or in fact. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989), abrogated on other grounds by *Bell Atl. Corp. v.*

Twombly, 550 U.S. 544 (2007) and 28 U.S.C. § 1915. Dismissal of frivolous actions is appropriate to prevent abuses of court process as well as to discourage the waste of judicial resources. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327; *Harkins v. Eldredge*, 505 F.2d 802, 804 (8th Cir. 1974). Although the court has a duty to show liberality toward pro se litigants and must use extreme caution in ordering sua sponte dismissal of a pro se complaint before the adverse party has been served and has had an opportunity to respond, the court still has a responsibility to determine that a claim is not frivolous before permitting a plaintiff to proceed. *Fitzgerald v. First E. Seventh St. Tenants Corp.*, 221 F.3d 362, 363 (2d Cir. 2000) (finding that a district court may dismiss a frivolous complaint sua sponte even when plaintiff has paid the filing fee).

To survive dismissal for failure to state a claim, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is “plausible on its face.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). “Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.” *Id.* (citing *Bell Atl. Corp.*, 550 U.S. at 555).

In addition, Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2) requires that a pleading contain a “short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Although Rule 8 does not require detailed factual allegations, it does “demand[] more than an unadorned, the-defendant-unlawfully-harmed-me accusation.” *Houston v. Collerman*, No. 9:16-CV-1009 (BKS/ATB), 2016 WL 6267968, at *2 (N.D.N.Y. Oct. 26, 2016) (quoting *Ashcroft*, 556 U.S. at 678). A pleading that contains allegations that “ ‘are so vague as to fail to give the defendants adequate notice of the claims against them’ is subject to dismissal.” *Id.* (citing *Sheehy v. Brown*, 335 F. App’x 102, 104 (2d Cir. 2009)). The court will now turn to a consideration of plaintiff’s complaint under the above standards.

II. Complaint

*2 Plaintiff alleges that on July 27, 2021 at approximately 10:00 a.m., he was on the “east side” of Utica, New York when the “cops hopped out [and] detained [him and] tried to search [him.]” (Compl. at 4). He further alleges that, based off a general description, the police searched plaintiff because he was “black in a certain area where a man with a gun had been alleged to be there.” (*Id.*). Plaintiff was arrested after “running for [his] life in an attempt to keep [the police] from violating [his] rights.” (*Id.*). Plaintiff was “thrown in jail” and charged

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with “possession of an instrument that was found almost an hour after, under some car in the parking lot of a car shop.” (*Id.* at 7).

Plaintiff then states that he appeared at a bail hearing in Oneida County Court, with the defendants District Attorney (“DA”) McNamara and Judge Michael L. Dwyer. (Compl. at 7). Plaintiff alleges that when Judge Dwyer learned of plaintiff’s intention to post bail, he “then raised it in a clear attempt to make it unreachable post bail reform[.]” (*Id.*). Plaintiff states that he was “denied audience with the Supreme Court and [his] habeas corpus was illegally unheard,” having been put “right back in front of [Judge] Dwyer for him to answer[.]” (*Id.*). Plaintiff claims that this is “not how the process works,” and that Judge Dwyer “didn’t have the authority to answer [his] habeas corpus.” (*Id.*).

Plaintiff further alleges that Judge Dwyer and DA McNamara proceeded to “violate [his] rights in every court proceeding leading up to trial.” (Compl. at 7). Plaintiff cites to a decision from the Fourth Department relative to his criminal case for the underlying facts surrounding his claims. According to *Matter of McNair v. McNamara*, plaintiff’s jury trial commenced on November 1, 2021, at which time a jury was selected and sworn, and three witnesses testified. 206 A.D. 3d 1689, 1690 (4th Dep’t 2022). November 2nd was a holiday, during which the trial was recessed. (*Id.*). On November 3rd, Judge Dwyer’s secretary notified plaintiff’s counsel that the Judge had a cold, wanted to make sure it was not COVID-19, he would not be in that day, and the jury would be sent home. (*Id.*). Plaintiff’s counsel was notified several days later that the matter would be scheduled for a retrial on November 15th. (*Id.*). Essentially, the Judge believed a mistrial was necessary because it was “physically impossible” for him to come to court and proceed with the trial, while he waited three to five days for the result of his COVID-19 test. (*Id.*). Over plaintiff’s counsel’s objections, the mistrial was declared as of November 3rd. (*Id.*). The Fourth Department ultimately agreed with plaintiff in concluding that there was no “manifest necessity” for the mistrial, and that the county court abused its discretion in granting the mistrial sua sponte. (*Id.* at 1690-92). Accordingly, the government was prohibited from retrying plaintiff on the underlying indictment based on double jeopardy grounds. Liberally construed, this court interprets plaintiff’s claims of constitutional violations in the instant complaint to relate to the underlying trial proceedings as described in *Matter of McNair*. Plaintiff also alleges that the police were “selective [and] omitted certain facts to

allow the proceedings to continue,” and that DA McNamara “also did not reveal certain facts in order to secure an indictment.” (Compl. at 7).

Plaintiff alleges damages including mental and physical injuries sustained during his incarceration. (Compl. at 5). He seeks monetary damages in the amount of twenty million dollars, as well as “punitive damages of relieving the officials of their official capacities.” (*Id.*).

DISCUSSION

III. Sovereign and Judicial Immunities

*3 The complaint must be dismissed as against named defendants Oneida County Courts and Officials and Judge Dwyer, because they are immune from suit. The Second Circuit has ruled that “the New York State Unified Court System is unquestionably an arm of the State, and is entitled to Eleventh Amendment sovereign immunity.” *Gollomp v. Spitzer*, 568 F.3d 355, 366 (2d Cir. 2009). Because the Oneida County Court is a part of the New York State Unified Court System, it is entitled to sovereign immunity. Similarly, judges within the New York State Unified Court System are entitled to Eleventh Amendment immunity to the extent they are sued in their official capacity. See *Aron v. Becker*, 48 F. Supp. 3d 347, 366 (N.D.N.Y. 2014) (dismissing claim against a Delaware County judge on sovereign immunity grounds). As both the Oneida County Court and Judge Dwyer are arms of the State, they are entitled to Eleventh Amendment immunity, and it is recommended that the complaint against them be dismissed with prejudice.

The complaint against Judge Dwyer in his personal capacity is subject to dismissal on judicial immunity grounds. See, e.g., *Washington v. Ciccone*, No. 3:21-CV-0564 (MAD/ML), 2021 WL 2935950, at *4 (N.D.N.Y. July 13, 2021) (Judicial immunity “shields judges from suit to the extent they are sued in their individual capacities[.]”), *report and recommendation adopted*, 2021 WL 4859663 (N.D.N.Y. Oct. 19, 2021). It is well settled that judges have absolutely immunity for their judicial acts performed in their judicial capacities. See *Mireles v. Waco*, 502 U.S. 9, 11 (1991); *Forrester v. White*, 484 U.S. 219, 225 (1988); *Shtrauch v. Dowd*, 651 F. App’x 72, 73-74 (2d Cir. 2016) (“Generally, ‘acts arising out of, or related to, individual cases before the judge are considered judicial in nature’”) (quoting *Bliven v. Hunt*, 579 F.3d 204, 210 (2d Cir. 2009)); *Kim v. Saccento*, No. 21-2865, 2022 WL 9583756, at *2 (2d Cir. Oct. 17, 2022), *cert. denied*, No.

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22-732, 2023 WL 2959393 (U.S. Apr. 17, 2023) (“the actions that [plaintiff] complains of – adverse decisions in a criminal proceeding – are plainly judicial in nature”); *Root v. Liston*, 444 F.3d 127, 132 (2d Cir. 2006) (judges who set bail enjoy absolute immunity) (collecting cases). “Judicial immunity applies even when the judge is accused of acting maliciously or corruptly.” *Coon v. Merola*, No. 1:19-CV-394 (DNH/ATB), 2019 WL 1981416, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. Apr. 8, 2019) (citing *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 419 n.12 (1976)), report and recommendation adopted, 2019 WL 1978595 (N.D.N.Y. May 3, 2019).

“The only two circumstances in which judicial immunity does not apply is when he or she takes action ‘outside’ his or her judicial capacity and when the judge takes action that, although judicial in nature, is taken ‘in absence of jurisdiction.’ ” *Id.* (quoting *Mireles*, 502 U.S. at 11-12). Here, plaintiff has failed to plausibly allege that Judge Dwyer was acting outside of his judicial capacity or in the absence of jurisdiction. To the extent that plaintiff alleges that his habeas corpus petition was not properly before Judge Dwyer, Article 70 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules specifically authorizes a petition for the writ to be made to a county judge being or residing within the county in which the petitioner is detained. N.Y. C.P.L.R. § 7002(b)(4). In the absence of any other allegation suggesting that the general rule regarding judicial immunity can be overcome, the court recommends dismissing with prejudice the complaint as against Judge Dwyer in his individual capacity. See *Edwardsen v. Aloï*, No. 5:17-CV-00202 (LEK/TWD), 2017 WL 1283496, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. Mar. 3, 2017) (recommending dismissal with prejudice on judicial immunity grounds), report and recommendation adopted, 2017 WL 1283763 (N.D.N.Y. Apr. 5, 2017).

Plaintiff has also included unidentified “officials” of the Oneida County Court as defendants in the caption of his complaint. There is, however, no specific allegation anywhere in the complaint referencing any other court official who was involved in the alleged violations of plaintiff’s constitutional rights. In any event, even if plaintiff had identified another court “official” as a defendant, judicial immunity has been extended to “ ‘certain others who perform functions closely associated with the judicial process.’ ” *Marshall v. New York State Pub. High Sch. Athletic Ass’n, Inc.*, 374 F. Supp. 3d 276, 288 (W.D.N.Y. 2019) (quoting inter alia *Cleavinger v. Saxner*, 474 U.S. 193, 200 (1985)). Quasi-judicial immunity is absolute if the official’s role “is ‘functionally comparable’ to that of a judge.” *Butz v. Economou*, 438 U.S. 478,

513 (1978); see *Cleavinger*, 474 U.S. at 201 (“Absolute immunity flows not from rank or title or location within the Government, but from the nature of the responsibilities of the individual official.” (internal quotation marks and citation omitted)); *Gross v. Reli*, 585 F.3d 72, 81 (2d Cir. 2009) (“Judicial and quasi-judicial immunity are both absolute immunities.” (citations omitted)). Much like judicial immunity, “[a] defendant entitled to quasi-judicial immunity loses that privilege only if [he or] she acts in the clear absence of all jurisdiction.” *Finn v. Anderson*, 592 F. App’x 16, 19 (2d Cir. 2014) (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). Thus, it is likely that the unidentified court official defendants would also be protected from suit based on the doctrine of quasi-judicial immunity.

IV. Prosecutorial Immunity

*4 The complaint is also subject to dismissal as against DA McNamara. The doctrine of absolute immunity applies broadly to shield a prosecutor from liability for money damages (but not injunctive relief) in a § 1983 lawsuit, even when the result may be that a wronged plaintiff is left without an immediate remedy.” *Anilao v. Spota*, 27 F.4th 855, 863-64 (2d Cir. 2022) (citing *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 427 (1976)). In *Anilao*, the Second Circuit explained:

Our cases make clear that prosecutors enjoy “absolute immunity from § 1983 liability for those prosecutorial activities intimately associated with the judicial phase of the criminal process.” *Barr v. Abrams*, 810 F.2d 358, 361 (2d Cir. 1987) (quotation marks omitted). The immunity covers “virtually all acts, regardless of motivation, associated with [the prosecutor’s] function as an advocate.” *Hill v. City of New York*, 45 F.3d 653, 661 (2d Cir. 1995) (quoting *Dory v. Ryan*, 25 F.3d 81, 83 (2d Cir. 1994)). For example, a prosecutor enjoys absolute immunity when determining which offenses to charge, initiating a prosecution, presenting a case to a grand jury, and preparing for trial. See *id.*; *Imbler*, 424 U.S. at 431, 96 S. Ct. 984 (concluding that a prosecutor is absolutely immune from a § 1983 suit for damages based on his “initiating a prosecution and ... presenting the State’s case”). For that reason, we have held that absolute immunity extends even to a prosecutor who “conspir[es] to present false evidence at a criminal trial. The fact that such a conspiracy is certainly not something that is properly within the role of a prosecutor is immaterial, because the immunity attaches to his function, not to the manner in which he performed it.” *Dory*, 25 F.3d at 83 (cleaned up).

Id. at 864. See also *Pinaud v. County of Suffolk*, 52 F.3d 1139, 1149 (2d Cir. 1995) (holding that absolute prosecutorial immunity protects a prosecutor for advocacy in connection with a bail application).

“By contrast, prosecutors receive only qualified immunity when performing ‘administrative duties and those investigatory functions that do not relate to an advocate’s preparation for the initiation of a prosecution or for judicial proceedings.’ ” *Simon v. City of New York*, 727 F.3d 167, 172 (2d Cir. 2013) (quoting *Buckley v. Fitzsimmons*, 509 U.S. 259, 273 (1993)). “Investigation, arrest, and detention have historically and by precedent been regarded as the work of police, not prosecutors, and they do not become prosecutorial functions merely because a prosecutor has chosen to participate.” *Id.* (interior quotation marks and citations omitted); see *Giraldo v. Kessler*, 694 F.3d 161, 166 (2d Cir. 2012) (“ ‘[A]ctions taken as an investigator enjoy only qualified immunity.’ ”) (quoting *Zahrey v. Coffey*, 221 F.3d 342, 346 (2d Cir. 2000)). “Under a functional approach, actions are not shielded by absolute immunity merely because they are performed by a prosecutor. ‘A prosecutor’s administrative duties and those investigatory functions that do not relate to an advocate’s preparation for the initiation of a prosecution or for judicial proceedings are not entitled to absolute immunity.’ ” *Giraldo*, 694 F.3d at 166 (quoting *Buckley*, 509 U.S. at 273).

Liberally construed, in this case plaintiff alleges that DA McNamara violated his rights by “hold[ing] plaintiff in an attempt to retry [him] illegally for 7 months” after the mistrial (Compl. at 7), and for failing to “reveal certain facts in order to secure an indictment” (*id.*). Otherwise, plaintiff generally alleges that DA McNamara violated his rights “in every court proceeding leading up to trial[,] “in the trial [and] after the first trial[.]” (*Id.*). With respect to the indictment, the courts have long held that a prosecutor’s determination to bring charges against an individual by presentment of a case to the grand jury is an act by an advocate intimately related to the judicial phase of the criminal process to which absolute prosecutorial immunity applies. See *Bernard v. County of Suffolk*, 356 F.3d 495, 503 (2d Cir. 2004) (The act of “knowingly presenting false evidence to, while at the same time withholding exculpatory evidence from [the grand jury] ... lie[s] at the very core of a prosecutor’s role as an advocate engaged in the judicial phase of the criminal process.”) (citing *Imbler*, 424 U.S. at 431 & n. 34); *Pinaud v. County of Suffolk*, 52 F.3d at 1149 (holding district attorneys absolutely immune from claim for malicious

prosecution and presentation of false evidence to the grand jury); *Maglione v. Briggs*, 748 F.2d 116, 118 (2d Cir. 1984) (“The presentation of a case to a grand jury falls squarely within the prosecutor’s traditional function and is thus subject to absolute immunity....”); *J. & W. Trading & Leasing Inc. v. New York*, No. 5:15-CV-327 (GLS/DEP), 2015 WL 4135961, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. 2015) (granting absolute immunity where prosecutor allegedly presented false testimony before grand jury). Accordingly, plaintiff may not pursue his § 1983 action against DA McNamara based on his alleged failure to disclose evidence to the grand jury.

*5 The court concludes that DA McNamara is also immune from any suit by plaintiff based on his efforts to continue the prosecution of plaintiff’s criminal case, although there is certainly less case law involving this scenario. Bearing in mind the standard of determining whether the specific conduct at issue is ‘intimately associated with the judicial phase of the criminal process,’ the court cannot conclude that DA McNamara’s efforts to retry plaintiff’s case after Judge Dwyer granted a mistrial runs afoul of the prosecutor’s protected function of initiating a prosecution and presenting the State’s case. See, e.g., *Davis v. State of N.Y.*, No. 90 Civ. 6170, 1991 WL 156351, at *6 (S.D.N.Y. Aug. 6, 1991) (whatever the defendant prosecutors may have done to delay plaintiff’s criminal retrial, “they acted in their capacity as advocates in the state’s prosecution ... [and] are entitled to absolute immunity”), *aff’d sub nom. Davis v. New York*, 106 F. App’x 82 (2d Cir. 2004); *Russo v. Vermont*, No. 1:10-CV-296, 2011 WL 4537956, at *6, 8 (D. Vt. July 29, 2011) (notwithstanding the plaintiff’s claim that the prosecutors in his case were “obsessed and won’t let go[,]” their decision “to proceed with a retrial ... is protected by prosecutorial immunity”), *report and recommendation adopted*, 2011 WL 4566303 (D. Vt. Sept. 29, 2011).

There is no evidence that DA McNamara’s conduct in this regard fell outside the scope of his function as an advocate. See *Anilao*, 27 F.4th at 865 (“ ‘[A]bsolute immunity must be denied’ only where there is both the absence of all authority (because, for example, no statute authorizes the prosecutor’s conduct) and the absence of any doubt that the challenged action falls well outside the scope of prosecutorial authority.... Prosecutors thus have absolute immunity in a § 1983 action ... so long as ‘they have at least a semblance of jurisdiction’ that does not run far afield of their job description.’ ”) (citations omitted). In particular, there is no suggestion that DA McNamara’s conduct in this respect could be interpreted as an “investigative or administrative task[]”, for which the

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prosecutor would only be eligible for qualified immunity. *Van de Kamp v. Goldstein*, 555 U.S. 335, 342 (2009) (quoting *Imbler*, 424 U.S. at 431 n.33); see also *McDonough v. Smith*, No. 1:15-CV-1505 (MAD/DJS), 2022 WL 3279348, at *17 (N.D.N.Y. Aug. 11, 2022) (“Investigative tasks beyond the scope of absolute immunity are those ‘normally performed by a detective or police officer.’”) (quoting *Buckley*, 509 U.S. at 273); *Moye v. City of New York*, 11 Civ. 316, 2012 WL 2569085, at *6 (S.D.N.Y. July 3, 2012) (“[T]he Second Circuit has distinguished between ‘preparing for the presentation of an existing case,’ on the one hand, and attempting to ‘furnish evidence on which a prosecution could be based,’ on the other hand, with only the former entitling a prosecutor to absolute immunity.”) (quoting *Smith v. Garretto*, 147 F.3d 91, 94 (2d Cir. 1998)). Accordingly, the complaint should be dismissed as against DA McNamara based on his absolute prosecutorial immunity.

V. Defendant Utica Police Department

“Although a municipality is subject to suit pursuant to section 1983, see *Monell v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs.*, 436 U.S. 658, 690 (1978), a municipal police department does not have the capacity to be sued as an entity separate from the municipality in which it is located.” *White v. Syracuse Police Dep’t*, No. 5:18-CV-1471(GTS/DEP), 2019 WL 981850, at *1 (N.D.N.Y. Jan. 7, 2019), report and recommendation adopted, 2019 WL 974824 (N.D.N.Y. Feb. 28, 2019) (citing *Krug v. Cnty. of Rennselaer*, 559 F. Supp. 2d 223, 247 (N.D.N.Y. 2008)); see also *Turczyn ex rel. McGregor v. City of Utica*, No. 13-CV-1357 (GLS/ATB), 2014 WL 6685476, at *2 (N.D.N.Y. Nov. 26, 2014). Accordingly, the complaint as against defendant Utica Police Department must be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

Even if the court were to construe plaintiff’s claims against the Utica Police Department as against the City of Utica, dismissal would still be warranted. A municipality may only be named as a defendant in certain circumstances. Pursuant to the standard for establishing municipal liability laid out in *Monell*, in order to set forth a cognizable claim for municipal liability under Section 1983, a plaintiff must plead and prove that a deprivation of his constitutional rights “was caused by a governmental custom, policy, or usage of the municipality.” *Jones v. Town of E. Haven*, 691 F.3d 72, 80 (2d Cir. 2012) (citing *Monell*, 436 U.S. 658); see also *Vippolis v. Vill. of Haverstraw*, 768 F.2d 40, 44 (2d Cir. 1985) (“The plaintiff must first prove the existence of a municipal policy or custom in order to show that the municipality took some

action that caused his injuries beyond merely employing the misbehaving officer.”).

*6 A municipality may be liable for deprivation of constitutional rights under Section 1983 for policies or customs resulting in inadequate training, supervision, or hiring when the failure to train, supervise, or hire amounts to deliberate indifference to the rights of those with whom municipal employees will come into contact. See *City of Canton, Ohio v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378, 388-89 (1989). A plaintiff must also establish a causal connection - an affirmative link - between the policy and the deprivation of his constitutional rights. *Oklahoma v. Tuttle*, 471 U.S. 808, 823 (1985). Indeed, municipalities may only be held liable when the municipality itself deprives an individual of a constitutional right; it “may not be held liable on a theory of respondeat superior.” *Jeffes v. Barnes*, 208 F.3d 49, 56 (2d Cir. 2000).

“[A] prerequisite to municipal liability under *Monell* is an underlying constitutional violation by a state actor.” *Henry-Lee v. City of New York*, 746 F. Supp. 2d 546, 567 (S.D.N.Y. 2010). As the Second Circuit has noted, “*Monell* does not provide a separate cause of action for the failure by the government to train its employees; it extends liability to a municipal organization where that organization’s failure to train, or the policies or customs that it has sanctioned, led to an independent constitutional violation.” *Segal v. City of New York*, 459 F.3d 207, 219 (2d Cir. 2006); see also *id.* (noting that once a “district court properly [finds] no underlying constitutional violation, its decision not to address the municipal defendants’ liability under *Monell* [is] entirely correct”).

In this case, plaintiff has (1) not identified any of the Utica police officers who allegedly violated his constitutional rights as defendants in this action, and (2) has offered no evidence that any such officer was acting pursuant to a policy or custom of the City when they detained and/or arrested plaintiff, or throughout the course of plaintiff’s criminal proceeding. Accordingly, the City cannot be held liable for plaintiff’s allegations of false arrest/imprisonment, malicious prosecution or unspecified due process violations, as stated in the complaint.

VI. Eighth Amendment Cruel and Unusual Punishment

Plaintiff has alleged an Eighth Amendment claim of cruel and unusual punishment. (Compl. at 7-8). Plaintiff does not specify against whom he alleges this violation of his

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constitutional rights. (*Id.*). In any event, these protections of the Eighth Amendment “only apply to a person who has been criminally convicted and sentenced; they do not apply to the conduct of police officers in connection with the investigation and arrest of suspects prior to conviction and sentencing.” *Spicer v. Burden*, 564 F. Supp. 3d 22, 31 (D. Conn. 2021) (citing *Whitley v. Albers*, 475 U.S. 312, 318-19 (1986)); *City of Revere v. Mass. Gen. Hosp.*, 463 U.S. 239, 244 (1983). Accordingly, any claim purportedly brought by plaintiff under the Eighth Amendment for cruel and unusual punishment must be dismissed.

VII. Opportunity to Amend

Generally, before the court dismisses a pro se complaint or any part of the complaint sua sponte, the court should afford the plaintiff the opportunity to amend at least once; however, leave to re-plead may be denied where any amendment would be futile. *Ruffolo v. Oppenheimer & Co.*, 987 F.2d 129, 131 (2d Cir. 1993). Futility is present when the problem with plaintiff's causes of action is substantive such that better pleading will not cure it. *Cuoco v. Moritsugu*, 222 F.3d 99, 112 (2d Cir. 2000) (citation omitted).

Here, the court is recommending dismissal with prejudice as to defendant Utica Police Department, because the department may not be sued under § 1983. The court is further recommending dismissal with prejudice as to defendants Judge Dwyer, the Oneida County Courts and Officials, and DA McNamara, based on their absolute immunity from suit.

*7 Notwithstanding my recommendation that each of the named defendants be dismissed with prejudice, the court cannot say at this early stage of the litigation that plaintiff would be unable to amend his complaint to state a viable claim. Thus, the court recommends providing plaintiff the opportunity to amend his complaint for the limited purpose of asserting those claims alleging constitutional violations surrounding his detention, arrest, and subsequent criminal prosecution as set forth in his complaint, against the appropriate defendants. Plaintiff is reminded that if he intends to name the City of Utica as a defendant, he must plead, and ultimately prove, that a deprivation of his constitutional rights was caused by a custom, policy, or usage of the municipality. Likewise, plaintiff must specifically identify any individual law enforcement officer he is alleging violated his constitutional rights. If plaintiff chooses to amend his complaint, he must also specifically set forth the personal involvement of each named defendant relative to the conduct alleged to have violated his constitutional rights.

If the court approves this recommendation and allows plaintiff to submit a proposed amended complaint, plaintiff should be warned that any amended complaint must be a **complete and separate pleading**. Plaintiff must state all of his claims in the new pleading and may not incorporate by reference any part of his original complaint.

WHEREFORE, based on the findings above, it is

ORDERED, that plaintiff's motion to proceed IFP (Dkt. No. 2) is **GRANTED**,¹ and it is

¹ Although his IFP Application has been granted, plaintiff will still be required to pay fees that he may incur in this action, including copying and/or witness fees.

RECOMMENDED, that this action be **DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE** as against named defendants **UTICA POLICE DEPARTMENT, JUDGE MICHAEL L. DWYER, ONEIDA COUNTY COURTS a/k/a/ ONEIDA COUNTY COURTS AND OFFICIALS, and DISTRICT ATTORNEY SCOTT McNAMARA**, and it is

RECOMMENDED, that plaintiff's complaint otherwise be **DISMISSED WITHOUT PREJUDICE**, and that, if the District Court adopts this recommendation, plaintiff be given forty-five (45) days to amend his complaint to the extent authorized, and that plaintiff be advised that any amended pleading must be a **COMPLETE PLEADING, WHICH WILL SUPERSEDE THE ORIGINAL**, and that plaintiff must include all remaining facts and causes of action in the amended complaint. No facts or claims from the original complaint may be incorporated by reference, and it is

RECOMMENDED, that if the District Court adopts this recommendation, and plaintiff does not elect to amend his complaint within the imposed deadline, the case be dismissed in its entirety, with prejudice, and it is

RECOMMENDED, that if the District Court adopts this recommendation, and plaintiff files a proposed amended complaint, the proposed amended complaint be returned to me for review of the amended complaint and any orders relating to service on the defendants, and it is

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ORDERED, that the Clerk of the Court serve a copy of this Order and Report-Recommendation on plaintiff by regular mail.

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1) and Local Rule 72.1(c), the parties have fourteen (14) days within which to file written objections to the foregoing report. Such objections shall be filed with the Clerk of the Court. **FAILURE TO OBJECT TO THIS REPORT WITHIN FOURTEEN DAYS WILL**

PRECLUDE APPELLATE REVIEW. *Roldan v. Racette*, 984 F.2d 85, 89 (2d Cir. 1993) (citing *Small v. Sec'y of Health and Hum. Servs.*, 892 F.2d 15 (2d Cir. 1989)); 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), 6(e), 72.

All Citations

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Filings (1)

Title	PDF	Court	Date	Type
1. Docket 6:23-CV-00699 McNair v. Utica Police Department et al	—	N.D.N.Y.	June 12, 2023	Docket

History (2)

Direct History (2)

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2. [McNair v. Utica Police Department](#)
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Brandon T. MCNAIR, Plaintiff,

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Signed August 1, 2023

Attorneys and Law Firms

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ORDER ON REPORT & RECOMMENDATION

DAVID N. HURD, United States District Judge

*1 On June 12, 2023, *pro se* plaintiff Brandon T. McNair (“plaintiff”) filed this 42 U.S.C. § 1983 action alleging that various defendants violated his civil rights. Dkt. No. 1. Along with his complaint, plaintiff also sought leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* (“IFP Application”). Dkt. No. 2.

On June 26, 2023, U.S. Magistrate Judge Andrew T. Baxter granted plaintiff’s IFP application and advised by Report & Recommendation (“R&R”) that plaintiff’s complaint be dismissed with partial leave to amend. Dkt. No. 4. As Judge Baxter explained, plaintiff’s claims against defendants Utica Police Department, Judge Michael L. Dwyer, Oneida County Courts, and District Attorney Scott McNamara must be dismissed with prejudice because those defendants were shielded from plaintiff’s claims by various immunity doctrines. *Id.* However, Judge Baxter concluded that plaintiff might still be able to assert a viable claim, or perhaps claims, for “alleged constitutional violations surrounding his

detention, arrest, and subsequent criminal prosecution as set forth in his complaint, against the appropriate defendants.” *Id.*

Plaintiff has not filed objections. The time period in which to do so has expired. *See* Dkt. No. 4. Upon review for clear error, the R&R is accepted and will be adopted in all respects. *See* FED. R. CIV. P. 72(b).

Therefore, it is

ORDERED that

1. The Report & Recommendation is ACCEPTED;

2. Plaintiff’s complaint is DISMISSED with prejudice against defendants Utica Police Department, Judge Michael L. Dwyer, Oneida County Courts a/k/a Oneida County Courts and Officials, and District Attorney Scott McNamara;

3. Plaintiff’s complaint is otherwise DISMISSED without prejudice;

4. Plaintiff shall have forty-five days in which to file an amended complaint that conforms with the instructions set forth in Judge Baxter’s June 26, 2023 Report & Recommendation;

5. If plaintiff files an amended complaint within this forty-five-day period, the matter shall be REFERRED to Judge Baxter for further review and any other action as appropriate; and

6. If plaintiff does not file an amended complaint within this forty-five-day period, the Clerk of the Court is directed to close this action without further Order of this Court.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

All Citations

Not Reported in Fed. Supp., 2023 WL 4931609

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Filings (1)

Title	PDF	Court	Date	Type
1. Docket 6:23-CV-00699 McNair v. Utica Police Department et al	—	N.D.N.Y.	June 12, 2023	Docket

History (2)

Direct History (2)

1. [McNair v. Utica Police Department](#)

2023 WL 4935993 , N.D.N.Y. , June 26, 2023

Report and Recommendation Adopted by

2. [McNair v. Utica Police Department](#)

2023 WL 4931609 , N.D.N.Y. , Aug. 01, 2023

2019 WL 1981416

Only the Westlaw citation is currently available.
United States District Court, N.D. New York.

Donald James COON, Plaintiff,
v.
Frank MEROLA, et al., Defendants.

1:19-CV-394 (DNH/ATB)
|
Signed 04/08/2019

Attorneys and Law Firms

Donald James Coon, Troy, NY, pro se.

ORDER and REPORT-RECOMMENDATION

Hon. Andrew T. Baxter, U.S. Magistrate Judge

*1 The Clerk has sent to the Court a civil rights complaint filed by pro se plaintiff Donald James Coon, together with a motion to proceed in forma pauperis ("IFP"). (Dkt. Nos. 1, 2).

I. In Forma Pauperis ("IFP") Application

A review of plaintiff's IFP application shows that he declares he is unable to pay the filing fee. (Dkt. No. 2). The court finds for purposes of this recommendation, that plaintiff meets the financial criteria for IFP status.

In addition to determining whether plaintiff meets the financial criteria to proceed IFP, the court must also consider the sufficiency of the allegations set forth in the complaint in light of 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which provides that the court shall dismiss the case at any time if the court determines that the action is (i) frivolous or malicious; (ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or (iii) seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)-(iii).

In determining whether an action is frivolous, the court must consider whether the complaint lacks an arguable basis in law or in fact. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). Dismissal of frivolous actions is appropriate to prevent abuses of court process as well as to discourage the waste of judicial resources. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327; *Harkins v. Eldridge*, 505 F.2d 802, 804 (8th Cir. 1974). Although the court has a duty to

show liberality toward *pro se* litigants, and must use extreme caution in ordering *sua sponte* dismissal of a *pro se* complaint before the adverse party has been served and has had an opportunity to respond, the court still has a responsibility to determine that a claim is not frivolous before permitting a plaintiff to proceed. *Fitzgerald v. First East Seventh St. Tenants Corp.*, 221 F.3d 362, 363 (2d Cir. 2000) (finding that a district court may dismiss a frivolous complaint *sua sponte* even when plaintiff has paid the filing fee).

To survive dismissal for failure to state a claim, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is "plausible on its face." *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1949 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). "Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice." *Id.* (citing *Bell Atl. Corp.*, 550 U.S. at 555). The court will now turn to a consideration of the plaintiff's complaint under the above standards.

II. Complaint

Although plaintiff's complaint is very conclusory, a liberal reading of the allegations contained therein show that plaintiff is attempting to allege that the Rensselaer County Clerk and his John/Jane Doe Deputy Clerks have violated plaintiff's constitutional rights in connection with a state court law suit that plaintiff has attempted to bring. (Complaint ("Compl.") generally) (Dkt. No. 1). In order to understand plaintiff's allegations in this action, the court must discuss another action filed by this plaintiff in 2016. In 2016, plaintiff filed a federal action in this court in which he named a variety of defendants, including Police Chief George Bell, the Villages of Cambridge and Greenwich, various district attorneys, Claverack Insurance Company, Glens Falls Hospital, Washington County Child Protective Services, and a police officer. *Coon v. Bell*, No. 1:16-CV-291 (TJM/DJS).

*2 After initial review of plaintiff's complaint in *Coon v. Bell*, Magistrate Judge Daniel Stewart found that plaintiff failed to state claims against the defendants and recommended that he be allowed to file an amended complaint in an effort to cure the deficiencies in the original. (Dkt. No. 8 in 16-CV-291). United States District Court Judge Thomas J. McAvoy adopted Magistrate Judge Stewart's recommendation on May 23, 2016. (Dkt. No. 11 in 16-CV-291). Plaintiff complied with the court's direction and filed an amended complaint on May 23, 2016. (Dkt. No. 12 in 16-CV-291).

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Magistrate Judge Stewart conducted an initial review of the amended complaint and found that plaintiff failed to cure most of the deficiencies that were in the original. (Dkt. No. 13 in 16-CV-291). Magistrate Judge Stewart recommended dismissing most of the claims and most of the defendants from the action, while allowing a Fourth Amendment illegal search claim and Fourth Amendment excessive force claim to proceed against defendant Bell.¹ (Dkt. No. 13 in 16-CV-291). Magistrate Judge Stewart's recommendation was adopted by Judge McAvoy on November 2, 2016. (Dkt. No. 16 in 16-CV-291).

¹ Defendant Bell has since passed away, and his estate's representative has been substituted as a party. (Dkt. Nos. 52, 71). Another defendant was joined to 16-CV-291, and there have been various other proceedings in that case, but those details are not relevant to this action.

In Magistrate Judge Stewart's report and recommendation, he found that plaintiff's defamation claims against defendant Bell and his attempted contract claims against defendant Bell and Claverack Insurance Company were, at best, state law claims.² (Dkt. No. 13 in 16-CV-291 at 4). Plaintiff then states that he "filed said claims" in the Rensselaer County Supreme Court. (Compl. at 1). Plaintiff states that in 2017, Judge Andrew G. Ceresia granted plaintiff poor person status, but that when he went to the Rensselaer County Clerk's office, defendant Merola told plaintiff that Judge Ceresia's order was "no good and they wouldn't honor it." (Compl. at 2). Plaintiff states that he brought Judge Ceresia's order to the Clerk's office four more times, and "finally" on March 11, 2019, a clerk that plaintiff had never seen before stamped the Judge's order and kept a copy. (*Id.*)

² Although plaintiff states in this action that Magistrate Judge Stewart told plaintiff that the contract and defamation claims "needed to be refiled in Supreme Court," that is not exactly what Magistrate Judge Stewart said. His exact words were that "[l]iberally construed, plaintiff *might* be attempting to make state law defamation and intentional interference with a contract claims. *Again, however, Plaintiff's vague and conclusory allegations fail to plausibly state such claims.*" (Dkt. No. 13 in 16-CV-291 at 4) (emphasis added). The court merely notes this for the record. Magistrate Judge Stewart's dismissal

and his language are not relevant to the findings herein.

Plaintiff alleges that he has been denied his "rightful benefits and access to the court." Plaintiff states that he even had "to choose between the suit or my housing," and that he was homeless from January 12, 2018 until April 24, 2018. (*Id.*) Plaintiff states that the Rensselaer County Supreme Court wrote plaintiff "2 times the County Clerk's staff made me pay for RJJ motion I had already paid for. They told me to give letter [sic] to the Clerk and I would get my monies back." (*Id.*)

Plaintiff states that he is seeking "just compensation" for the Rensselaer County Clerks' actions who refused to recognize his "poor person status" from 2017 until 2019. Plaintiff states that he still has not "received anything" from the "grant[ed] status" because the Clerks refused to grant "my said status." (*Id.*) Plaintiff seeks substantial monetary relief. (*Id.*)

III. Judicial Immunity

A. Legal Standards

***3** With minor exceptions, judges are entitled to absolute immunity for actions relating to the exercise of their judicial functions. *Mireles v. Waco*, 502 U.S. 9, 9-10 (1991). Judicial immunity has been created for the public interest in having judges who are "at liberty to exercise their functions with independence and without fear of consequences." *Huminski v. Corsones*, 396 F.3d 53, 74 (2d Cir. 2004). Judicial immunity applies even when the judge is accused of acting maliciously or corruptly. *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 419 n.12 (1976) (citing *Pierson v. Ray*, 386 U.S. 547, 554 (1967)). Judicial immunity is immunity from suit, not just immunity from the assessment of damages. *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 526 (1985). The only two circumstances in which judicial immunity does not apply is when he or she takes action "outside" his or her judicial capacity and when the judge takes action that, although judicial in nature, is taken "in absence of jurisdiction." *Mireles*, 502 U.S. at 11-12.

Absolute immunity extends to court clerks who perform tasks " 'which are judicial in nature and an integral part of the judicial process.' " *Proctor v. Quinn*, No. 19-CV-833, 2019 WL 692935, at *2 (E.D.N.Y. Feb. 19, 2019) (quoting *Rodriguez v. Weprin*, 116 F.3d 62, 66 (2d Cir. 1997)). The court's " 'inherent power to control its docket is part of its function of resolving disputes between parties' and is thus 'a function for which judges and their supporting staff

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are afforded absolute immunity.’ ” *Id.* (quoting *Rodriguez*, 116 F.3d at 66); and citing *Pikulin v. Gonzalez*, No. 07-CV-0412 (CBA), 2007 WL 1063353, at *2 (E.D.N.Y. Apr. 5, 2007) (finding that absolute judicial immunity extends to “the Clerk’s Office activities of filing and docketing legal documents”). However, a court clerk may not be entitled to absolute immunity where the clerk’s refusal to accept the papers of a litigant seeking to commence an action results in the deprivation of the individual’s constitutional rights. *Glass v. New York Supreme Court Appellate Division*, No. 1:17-CV-226, 2017 WL 9487181, at *3 (N.D.N.Y. Apr. 26, 2017) (citations omitted).

In determining whether the clerk’s conduct in a particular case is “judicial” in nature, the court takes a “functional approach” and allows the defendant absolute immunity when the clerk is performing a “discretionary act, or performing a duty that inherently relates to resolving a dispute.” *Vance v. State of New York Dep’t of Corrections*, No. 9:18-CV-748, 2018 WL 6047828, at *10 (N.D.N.Y. Nov. 19, 2018) (quoting *Dzwonczyk v. Suddaby*, No. 10-CV-0300, 2010 WL 1704722, at *6 (N.D.N.Y. Apr. 28, 2010) (citing *Rodriguez*, 116 F.3d at 67) (internal quotation marks omitted)).

B. Application

Plaintiff’s statements in this case are conclusory and essentially, he is suing the “clerks” because they would not file his poor person status order between 2017 and 2019. At best, he alleges a delay in granting him poor person status because it appears that a clerk finally took and filed plaintiff’s order, and at the end of his complaint, plaintiff alleges that he “still” has not “received a thing or any help from *the granyled [sic] status*.” (Compl. at 2) (emphasis added). It is unclear what plaintiff believes he should have “received” or to what “help” he thinks he is entitled from the clerks beyond filing his order.

It is also unclear how plaintiff alleges that he was denied “access to courts” because he states that he filed his state law claims in the Rensselaer County Supreme Court. (Compl. at 1). However, he claims he was denied his “rightful benefits,” and that somehow the clerk’s actions in delaying the filing of his poor person order were related to his homelessness between January 12, 2018 and April 24, 2018. Plaintiff claims that he had to choose between “the suit” or his housing, but he does not explain why this is true or why this would be a denial of his constitutional rights. Plaintiff also states that the clerks made plaintiff pay for his RJI “motion,” but that he was told that if he wrote a letter, he would get his money back.

*4 As it is written, plaintiff’s complaint is too conclusory to state a claim against any of the clerks in this action, whether named or unnamed,³ and the court will recommend dismissal.

3 Finally, the court must note that the United States Marshal would not be able to effect service of process on a “John or Jane Doe” defendant. In order for plaintiff to pursue his claims against John Doe defendants, he would ultimately be required to ascertain their identity. *LaPoint v. Vasiloff*, No. 5:15-CV-185, 2015 WL 1524437, at *4 (N.D.N.Y. Apr. 2, 2015).

IV. Opportunity to Amend

A. Legal Standards

Generally, when the court dismisses a pro se complaint *sua sponte*, the court should afford the plaintiff the opportunity to amend at least once; however, leave to re-plead may be denied where any amendment would be futile. *Ruffolo v. Oppenheimer & Co.*, 987 F.2d 129, 131 (2d Cir. 1993).

B. Application

In this case, the court will recommend dismissal without prejudice, even though the court has serious doubts that plaintiff will be able to amend his complaint to state a claim. However, because there are situations in which a clerk would not be entitled to absolute immunity, and plaintiff in this case has failed to include enough facts for the court to make an accurate determination, the court will recommend dismissal without prejudice to plaintiff submitting an amended complaint.

If the court adopts this recommendation, and plaintiff is afforded the opportunity to amend, he should be afforded forty-five (45) days from the date of the order adopting this court’s recommendation. Plaintiff should also be advised that if he files an amended complaint, it must be a complete pleading which must supercede the original and may not incorporate any facts from the original by reference.

WHEREFORE, based on the findings above, it is

ORDERED, that plaintiff’s motion to proceed IFP (Dkt. No. 2) be **GRANTED for purposes of filing**, and it is further

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RECOMMENDED, that the complaint be **DISMISSED** based on quasi-judicial immunity and for failure to state a claim pursuant to [28 U.S.C. § 1915\(e\)\(2\)\(B\)\(ii\) and \(iii\)](#) **WITHOUT PREJUDICE** to plaintiff filing an amended complaint, and it is

RECOMMENDED, that if the District Court adopts this recommendation, plaintiff be directed to file his amended complaint or ask for an extension of time to do so within **FORTY-FIVE (45) DAYS** from the date of the District Court's order adopting the recommendation, and it is

RECOMMENDED, that if plaintiff files an amended complaint within the appropriate time, the court return the proposed amended complaint to me for initial review, and it is

RECOMMENDED, that if the court adopts this recommendation, and plaintiff fails to file an amended complaint or ask for an extension of time to do so at the

expiration of the forty-five (45) days, the complaint be dismissed with prejudice and the case closed, and it is

ORDERED, that the Clerk of the Court serve a copy of this Order and Report-Recommendation on plaintiff by regular mail.

Pursuant to [28 U.S.C. § 636\(b\)\(1\)](#) and Local Rule 72.1(c), the parties have fourteen (14) days within which to file written objections to the foregoing report. Such objections shall be filed with the Clerk of the Court. **FAILURE TO OBJECT TO THIS REPORT WITHIN FOURTEEN DAYS WILL PRECLUDE APPELLATE REVIEW.** *Roldan v. Racette*, 984 F.2d 85, 89 (2d Cir. 1993)(citing *Small v. Secretary of Health and Human Services*, 892 F.2d 15 (2d Cir. 1989)); 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), 6(e), 72.

All Citations

Not Reported in Fed. Supp., 2019 WL 1981416

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Filings (1)

Title	PDF	Court	Date	Type
1. Docket 1:19-CV-00394 Coon v. Merola et al	—	N.D.N.Y.	Apr. 03, 2019	Docket

History (2)

Direct History (2)

1. [Coon v. Merola](#)
2019 WL 1981416 , N.D.N.Y. , Apr. 08, 2019

Report and Recommendation Adopted by

2. [Coon v. Merola](#)
2019 WL 1978595 , N.D.N.Y. , May 03, 2019

2019 WL 1978595

Only the Westlaw citation is currently available.
United States District Court, N.D. New York.

Donald James COON, Plaintiff,

v.

Frank MEROLA, Rensselaer County Clerk; and Jane/
John Does, Clerks at County Clerk's Office, Defendants.

1:19-CV-394 (DNH/ATB)

I

Signed 05/03/2019

Attorneys and Law Firms

DONALD JAMES COON, Plaintiff pro se, 289 5th Avenue,
Troy, NY 12180.

DECISION and ORDER

DAVID N. HURD, United States District Judge

*1 Pro se plaintiff Donald James Coon brought this civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. On April 8, 2019, the Honorable Andrew T. Baxter, United States Magistrate Judge, advised by Report-Recommendation that plaintiff's complaint be dismissed without prejudice but that he be given an opportunity to amend. No objections to the Report-Recommendation have been filed.

Based upon a careful review of the entire file and the recommendations of the Magistrate Judge, the Report-Recommendation is accepted in whole. See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1).

Therefore, it is

ORDERED that

1. Plaintiff's complaint is DISMISSED without prejudice;
2. Plaintiff is provided forty-five (45) days from the date of this Decision and Order to file an amended complaint that cures the defects identified in the Report-Recommendation;
3. If plaintiff files a timely amended complaint, it be forwarded to the Magistrate Judge for review; and
4. If plaintiff fails to file an amended complaint within forty-five (45) days of the date of this Decision and Order, the complaint be dismissed with prejudice and without further order.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

All Citations

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Filings (1)

Title	PDF	Court	Date	Type
1. Docket 1:19-CV-00394 Coon v. Merola et al	—	N.D.N.Y.	Apr. 03, 2019	Docket

History (2)**Direct History (2)**

1. [Coon v. Merola](#)

2019 WL 1981416 , N.D.N.Y. , Apr. 08, 2019

Report and Recommendation Adopted by

2. [Coon v. Merola](#)

2019 WL 1978595 , N.D.N.Y. , May 03, 2019